English Readings for Schools

POEMS OF ROBERT BROWNING

MODELS

"The virtue of books is the perfecting of reason, which is indeed the happiness of man."

Richard De Bury.

"On bokès for
to rede I me
delyte."

Chaucer.

Eng. 2 Cross 1915

English Readings for Schools

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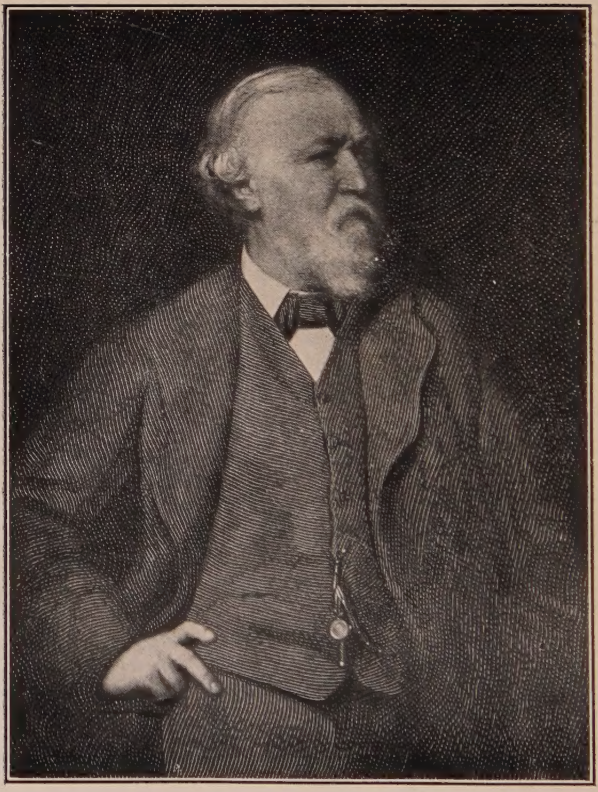

Robert Browning

From a portrait by Rudolf Lehmann, now in the National Portrait Gallery, London

POEMS

OF

ROBERT BROWNING

SELECTED AND EDITED

BY

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PREFATORY NOTE

These selections from Browning include the poems prescribed by the National Conference on Uniform Entrance Requirements in English, and such other poems as may appeal to students in the secondary school. The editor has also added a few numbers to which the student may be lifted by the power of a skilled teacher, such as *Saul* and *Rabbi Ben Ezra*. The poems are arranged in groups, proceeding from the easier to the more difficult. The notes and comment are interpretative rather than grammatical, philological, or historical, their aim being to stimulate the reader rather than to inform him. This method is made necessary by the peculiar difficulties which confront the beginner in approaching Browning. Oral reading will be found indispensable to a right understanding of the poems. A few poems (not among those prescribed for entrance to college) have been cut down considerably. Two hundred lines, for example, have been shorn from *The Flight of the Duchess* in order to bring it within the compass of this volume. The epistolary stanzas of *The Guardian Angel* are omitted, as are the closing lines of *The Glove* and two of the more difficult stanzas of *At the Mermaid*. The volume will have served its purpose if it aids in making Browning not a mere name, but a vital stimulus, to beginners in the study of poetry.

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Portrait of Robert Browning . . . . . *Frontispiece*

INTRODUCTION

I

BROWNING'S LIFE AND WORKS

ROBERT BROWNING was born in Camberwell, a suburb of London, May 7, 1812.

His father, also named Robert, was a notable man. Though denied the education he craved, the elder Browning became a highly self-educated man, through intimacy with a well-selected library of five thousand volumes, which had been deliberately gleaned from the book-stalls of London and Paris. As a youth he had been sent out to the West Indies to supervise his mother's plantation, but in his horror of slavery as seen there he abandoned his task and his inheritance with it; for his father, who was a sternly practical man, would tolerate no such sentiment and cast him off. The son then entered upon his life of clerical service in the Bank of England. In middle life he declined promotion to great responsibility at a large salary because it involved sacrificing his higher tastes in books and art to the demands of business. He lived to enjoy a long period of relief from toil and to see most of his son's best work. Rossetti speaks of him as "lovable beyond description." W. J. Stillman writes of him: "He had the perpetual juvenility of an ever-blessed

child. If to live in the world as not of it indicates a saintly nature, then Robert Browning the elder was a saint, a serene, untroubled soul, and as gentle as a gentle woman."

Browning's mother contributed chiefly to the emotional and spiritual life of her child. She was tender-hearted, sympathetic, and devoutly religious—"the true type of a Scottish gentlewoman," as Carlyle expressed it. The son was passionately devoted to her, and shared her interest in animals and flowers. In one of his love letters Browning writes: "You cannot conceive my mother's childlike faith in goodness."

"The home in Camberwell," writes Professor Charles Herford, "reflected the serene, harmonious, self-contented character of his parents. Friends rarely disturbed the even tenor of its ways, and the storms of politics seem to have intruded as faintly into this suburban seclusion as the roar of London. Well-to-do Camberwell perhaps contained few homes so pure and refined."

The education of Browning was irregular but he was given every opportunity to store and train his unusual type of mind. It is said that his father hummed him to sleep with the odes of Anacreon, and rimed the primary elements of education to make them the easier for the child to master. There was but a moderate amount of formal schooling, but home instruction and private tutoring amply supplied the lack, and the free range of a large library with the thoughtful guidance of such a father was the best of schooling. The Dulwich Gallery was in easy walking distance, and the galleries and concert rooms of London were visited frequently. He entered for a few lecture courses at University College, London, but went no further in formal college education. In this way he

missed the exact and systematic scholarship of such of his contemporaries as Tennyson and Arnold, but achieved rare affluence of mind, by his omnivorous reading. Joe Jefferson in his *Autobiography* says: "If any of the company opened a subject, Mr. Browning knew more about it than anybody else. Not that he intruded his information; on the contrary it was given with such modesty and good taste that we were only too glad to be enlightened from such a well-spring of learning."

Browning was destined to art from early years. He was a prolific writer of rimes in childhood, not remembering the time when he had not made them, but he insisted on destroying the copies of these juvenile poems which his father had cherished so proudly. Other arts than poetry had their claims on him. He was a skilled amateur in music and was fascinated with sculpture under the inspiration of his friend W. W. Story. When at the age of eighteen he decided to devote himself to poetry, he set himself to mastering Johnson's *Dictionary* to enrich his treasury of words. To this art of poetry he was devoted for sixty years, never turning aside save for an ineffectual attempt to gain a diplomatic post. He gave up all thought of lucrative employment, and his father gladly enabled him to do so. He lived in wise frugality the life of a cultivated gentleman, without the conscious pose of a bard, but with a strong sense of the dignity and duty of his high calling.

His first published volume, *Pauline*, 1833, was promising, and eloquent at times, yet ineffective on the whole. He proved his power two years later in *Paracelsus*, and won a few admirers. Encouraged by their praise, he set to work more elaborately on *Sordello*, which was not completed and published for five years. These three long

poems give the soul-history of three daring idealists, thinkers, poets, who had much in common with Browning. But all of these poems were too long, too serious, too difficult for the first essay of a new poet who wished to win an audience. Browning was far more effective, though less ambitious, in the shorter poems, the dramatic lyrics and romances, thrown off spontaneously and rapidly as an almost unconscious by-product while he was engaged on more pretentious works. When a friend once told him that his admirers wished for more of the lyrics, he answered in a tone of contempt: "Lyrics, if you want lyrics, I can give you bucketsful." All of these earlier short poems are dramatic, and not personal, and show a remarkable power in the young poet of entering imaginatively into the thought or passion of persons quite remote from his own nature. They were ultimately published with the dramas in a series of cheap, paper back volumes, called *Bells and Pomegranates*, designed by the poet and his publisher to win a larger public. Eight numbers were issued between 1841 and 1846, and a somewhat larger audience was reached; yet at the end of the series, Browning's name was scarcely known, while Tennyson and Miss Barrett had won fame and a general public by their volumes of 1842 and 1844 respectively.

Browning's more ambitious and formal endeavor at this time was devoted to the drama. Macready, the great tragic actor of the day, had been won by *Paracelsus*, and welcomed the acquaintance of the promising young poet. In Macready's home Browning met a new circle of actors and literary men, and felt a new stimulus to work. Fannie Kemble describes him at this time as "slim, dark, and very handsome—just a trifle of a dandy, addicted to lemon-colored kid gloves and such things, quite the glass

of fashion and the mould of form. But full of ambition, eager for success, eager for fame, and what is more, determined to conquer fame and win success." On the evening of May 26, 1836, after the triumphant performance of Talfourd's *Ion*, Browning supped at Macready's rooms with Wordsworth and Landor. "Write a play, Browning," said Macready, as his guests were leaving, "and keep me from going to America." "Shall it be historical or English? What do you say to a drama on Strafford?" replied Browning, who had been assisting Forster with a life of Strafford. Nearly a year later the play was produced by Macready with but meager stage furnishing. After a half-success for five nights it was withdrawn. Browning declared to his friends that he would never again write a play. Yet he repeatedly returned to the task, sometimes writing carefully according to the theatrical requirements of his day and doing his best to reach the living stage, in such plays as *The Return of the Druses*, *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon*, and *Colombe's Birthday*. But when failure attended these efforts, he took the larger freedom of the dramatic poem in his *Pippa Passes*, *King Victor and King Charles*, *A Soul's Tragedy*, and *Luria*, Browning's favorite among his dramas. While Browning failed to win success as a practical dramatist, this series of poetical dramas and dramatic poems is one of his richest contributions to English poetry.

Browning spent these years uneventfully in his suburban home. A small circle of literary acquaintance gradually opened to him, including John Forster and his friend Charles Dickens, then newly known to fame as author of *Pickwick* and *Oliver Twist*, Milnes, Landor, Wordsworth in rare visits to London, and Leigh Hunt, the patron of all young poets. At the house of Hunt, he met Carlyle,

who formed a strong liking for Browning, who became a frequent visitor at the Carlyle home. Yet he had few real friends.

In 1834 he had taken a trip of several months to Russia in a semi-official capacity, but his first journey to Italy in 1838 was of far more importance. It was made by slow going merchant vessel to suit his slender purse. He enjoyed "the solitariness of the one passenger among all those rough new creatures. I like it much and soon get deep into their friendship." The discovery of the derelict of an Algerine pirate, bottom up, and the gruesome greed of the British tars in rifling her, furnished a horribly grotesque incident. Yet in the midst of these surroundings he wrote his *Home Thoughts from the Sea* and *How They Brought the Good News*. Browning spent several weeks among the cities of northern Italy, and for the first time felt the charm which endeared to him that "woman country, wooed not wed, loved all the more by earth's male lands." Italy influenced Browning profoundly and she became a second mother-land to him. He was intimately acquainted with her art and with the glory of her great past particularly during the Renaissance. He used his knowledge of Italy immediately on his return in the writing of *Sordello* and *Pippa Passes*. He made a second Italian tour six years later.

Browning had now passed his thirtieth birthday and was entirely heart free, his strong affections spending themselves on his narrow family circle. To use his own figure in *A Tale*, the one string "which made love sound soft" was lacking in his harp. Then Elizabeth Barrett entered his life, bringing a new joy for himself and awakening a whole range of new powers. Their love story is one of the best known and fairest in all literary history,

and it is fully recorded in the published *Love Letters* and the *Sonnets from the Portuguese.*

Elizabeth Barrett (b. 1806) was England's chief poetess in the early Victorian era, rivaling Tennyson in contemporary favor. Certain injuries which she had sustained in girlhood made her an invalid for life. Years were spent in the utter seclusion of the sick-room. Yet an unconquerable spirit mastered the ruined body. We have but to read her published correspondence for these years to see how busily she kept employed. In spite of her suffering, she became highly self-educated. Her spirit found liberty in the volumes of verse she printed from time to time, yet even after the generous fame which greeted her volume in 1844, she was entirely unknown to the outside world.

Suddenly a pleasing reference to Browning's poetry in her *Lady Geraldine's Courtship* spanned the distance between their two lives. Words of appreciation for his poetry came but rarely to Browning then, and this flattering word was spoken by a poetess whose work he already admired cordially. On the advice of John Kenyon, Browning wrote a letter of acknowledgment. This opened a correspondence between them in almost daily exchange of letters. After three months Browning was permitted to call. He immediately offered his hand. Yet even after her heart was won, Miss Barrett would not suffer the strong attractive man to couple his life with her frail, ruined body; this, as she felt, would be cruel affection. The new joy that came with love, however, proved more potent than the medical treatment of years, and her health improved steadily. At last they were married in September, 1846.

The newly wedded poets passed by easy stages to Italy,

which was to be their home for the fifteen years of their union,—years which brought to both of them their best experiences, and produced a higher and more perfect art in both artists. As Browning wrote in *By the Fireside:*

> I am named and known by that moment's feat,
> There took my station and degree;
> So grew my own small life complete,
> As nature attained her best in me.

After brief sojourns at Pisa, Lucca, and elsewhere, they found a permanent home at Florence in the spacious second floor apartments of Casa Guidi near the Pitti Palace, which was soon stored with rare old furniture, mirrors, paintings, tapestries, and countless gleanings from the old marts of the city. Here with music and books and their own tasks as poets, and later still with the care of their son Robert Barrett, born in 1849, their home life seems to have been full of all that is best; so Browning was as much favored in this respect as he had been in old Camberwell days. They lived here with a scrupulous business-like economy which rather amused Mrs. Browning, who wrote to a friend: "Being descended from the blood of all the Puritans, and educated by the strictest of dissenters, he has a sort of horror about the dreadful fact of owing five shillings five days." It was not till 1856 that the bequest of John Kenyon to his pair of poet-friends raised them to comparative affluence. At Casa Guidi they welcomed many interesting people from the Anglo-American colony, W. W. Story the sculptor being chief among these. Here came American and English travelers, Bayard Taylor, Emerson, Thackeray, Hawthorne and Mrs. Jameson among them. Hawthorne's description in his *Italian Notes*, June 9, 1858, has become one of the classic frag-

ments in the biographies of Browning. Frances Power Cobb in her *Autobiography* tells of this period at some length: "Among our most frequent visitors was Mr. Browning. Always full of spirits, full of interest in everything from politics to hedge flowers, cordial and utterly unaffected, he was at all times a charming member of society; but I confess that in those days I had no adequate sense of his greatness as a poet. His conversation was so playful and light that it never occurred to me that I was wasting precious time chatting frivolously with him when I might have been gaining high thoughts and instruction. There was always a ripple of laughter around the sofa where he used to seat himself, generally beside some lady of the company, toward whom in his eagerness, he would push nearer and nearer, till she frequently rose to avoid falling off at the end. Never certainly did the proverb about the *irritabile genus* of poets prove less true. All through his life, even when the world had found him out, he remained the same absolutely unaffected, unassuming, genial English gentleman."

Outside of the home lay Florence, with her inexhaustible interest for Browning. The life of the street was picturesque, the shadows of the historic past fascinated his imagination, and he knew every nook and corner of the old palaces, monasteries, and churches with their faded splendors of the art of former days. Mrs. Browning went occasionally to the Pitti Gallery, or for a drive. Sometimes they fled from the heat of summer to the mountains or seashore. Twice they returned to England and Paris for a protracted visit. Yet their life was entirely uneventful and happy.

The years were too happy to be prolific of poetry. Browning produced only his *Christmas-Eve* and *Easter-*

Day (1850); and *Men and Women* (1855), the latter volume containing fifty short poems, including some of the finest things ever achieved by Browning. Yet he wrote only intermittently, as subjects offered themselves, not caring to occupy himself continuously on larger subjects. Mrs. Browning frequently used verse to voice her passionate interest in the struggle for Italian liberation. She also wrote *Aurora Leigh* (1856), her poetic novel, which stands as her most representative work, the outpouring of her rare womanhood. This all came to an end with her death in June, 1861.

Browning soon returned to England with his son, to whose education he devoted much of his attention. For the next twenty-five years he was one of the best known literary lions of London. Outwardly he lived the active life of social engagement with the best society London could afford,—dinners, garden parties, the galleries, exhibitions, and theaters. Seen and known everywhere, he proved himself a master conversationalist in all companies. Phillips Brooks records the following impression of him: "He is one of the nicest people in London to pass an evening with. He is a clear-headed and particularly clear-eyed man of the world, devoted to society, one of the greatest diners-out in London, cordial and hearty as a dear, old uncle, shakes your hand as if he were really glad to see you. He seemed to me very like some of the best of Thackeray's London men. But nobody ever talked more nobly, truly, and cheerily than he. I went home and slept after hearing him, as one does after a fresh starlight walk with a good cool breeze on his face." There was kindliness, courtesy, ease, the perfect flower of conventional good breeding in all he did. It was a busy, uneventful life, made noteworthy only by the personal

quality of Browning, which impressed everyone with whom he came in contact.

His first poetic utterance after the death of Mrs. Browning was in *Dramatis Personæ*, a volume of short poems, including his *Prospice* and *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, poems burdened with a weight of spiritual meaning which had come to him in his sorrow. Four years were then devoted to his longest, and in many respects, his most remarkable poem, *The Ring and the Book* (1868–69), based on the chance-found record of an Italian murder story. Then for a dozen years he passed uninterruptedly from one poetic task to another, issuing almost a volume a year. Most noteworthy among these is *Balaustion's Adventure*, an adaptation of the *Alcestis* of Euripides, and his *Dramatic Idyls*, including some of his finest narrative and descriptive poetry. His last volume of poems, *Asolando*, still fresh and spontaneous, was written during his closing years, and was published on the very last day of his life.

Fame came late to Browning, but came in abundant measure. *Men and Women*, 1855, turned the tide of opinion in his favor, and by the publication of *Dramatis Personæ*, 1864, he won recognition as a master poet. His fame and audience grew steadily until they reached an unusual culmination in the organization of the Browning Society in London, 1881, when a group of critics, students, and lovers of literature banded themselves together for the study of the works of a living poet. Browning accepted recognition, so slow in arriving, with courteous indifference, and would seldom talk of his poetry to acquaintances. Fame had come too late to furnish him an ambition; friendly criticism and appreciation had come too late to affect his art.

During his later years he made frequent visits to Italy,

but not to Florence, spending most of his time in Venice and its neighborhood. We have an excellent picture of Browning at this time in two articles in the Century Magazine for 1901, by his American friend, Mrs. Bronson. With the purchase of the Rezzonico Palace in Venice in 1888 Browning again had a permanent Italian home. He was even planning the purchase of the old tower at Asolo, which had long before caught his fancy. Young in spirit, vigorous and happy he continued to the very end. In the very last month of his life he was actively planning future work and future pleasure with the same spontaneity and cheer. His age seemed scarcely age at all. He had realized the prophecy of his own *Rabbi Ben Ezra*. He died in Venice, December 12, 1889, and was buried in Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey. Three years later Tennyson was laid by his side.

II

BROWNING AS A LITERARY ARTIST

As the Victorian Age recedes from our twentieth century and the verdict of time is passed on its leading writers, Browning has taken rank beside Tennyson as one of its chief poetic voices. Yet few important writers have suffered such extremes of abuse and adulation at the hands of critics. This has arisen from his uncompromising individuality in all that concerns his art. He did not care to follow the accepted conventions of art. He had no reverence for the mere patterns of great art. Poetry to him was a progressive revelation of the human spirit, requiring ever new forms in which to embody itself. He

shocked the taste of many by his frank handling of the grotesque, the horrible, the malevolent, the ridiculous, as he openly extended the field of poetry into many a hitherto forbidden realm. He ignored the accepted dogma of harmonious verse, and with almost reckless independence made a style and a prosody of his own. As his ear for the music of language was at times faulty, he produced some grievous discords. Tennyson could not like his poetry, though he liked the man greatly, and there is implied criticism in his remark to Allingham: "If the pronunciation of the English language were forgotten, Browning would be held the greatest of modern poets, having treated the greatest variety of subjects in a powerful manner." And Thackeray in rejecting Browning's poetry declared: "Well, you see I want poetry to be musical, to run sweetly." Yet by a power peculiarly his own, Browning has won the admiration of a wide audience of the most intelligent English readers.

Browning is essentially not a singer, an improviser of words sweetly tuned, but a creator, reproducing and interpreting life in word-pictures of men and women, who are types of some thought or passion of the human heart, or who in their story reveal some of the deeper truth of humanity. He is never concerned with mere beauty as such; the grotesque may be quite as important to him. Outward nature with all her loveliness, which had steeped the poetry of Wordsworth, Byron, and Shelley, and which was so important to Tennyson, is purely incidental, in his feeling, to the study of human nature. Furthermore, he would present man, not collectively, or as a mere unit in the large movements of history or of present society, but as an individual, in the inner sense of his own self-importance; for the most trivial of men lives a life that is large to

himself as compared with the big things of the outer world. And Browning is interested not merely in what a man does, in what "takes the eye, and has the price," but he traces with close concern unvoiced passions, unrealized ideals, unnoted struggles, hidden sins and sorrows, and the deep heart's joy—all that vital personality which lies beneath every man's outward and obvious career.

Hence Browning's works must be regarded as a series of representations in verse of human personalities, of men or women, whose thought or feeling reveals some truth of humanity. Browning has created these personalities by scores and hundreds. A chance anecdote, a picture, a fragment of history or literature would start this creative activity awork,—the Cavalier singing for King Charles, the French soldier-boy at Ratisbon, Hervé Riel saving the French fleet, Pheidippides in his world renowned Marathon race. Or it may be some purely imaginary tale or passion, such as the Duchess escaping from the conventional life of her "middle-age-manners-adapter" to find freedom with the gypsy crone. These flashes of humanity were Browning's poems.

To aid him in revealing the inner life of men through the art of poetry, Browning adopted the dramatic monologue as his usual type of poem. The monologue, or characteristic speech of some single clearly imagined person, has existed in folk tales and folk ballads since the primitive ages of poetry. Early epics are studded with them. Then the Shakespearean drama is continually showing the manifold effectiveness of single speeches to tell a story, to reveal a situation or character, to make clear some bond of human relationship, or to embody a dominant passion or a wave of feeling. The Shakespearean soliloquies are continually used in these ways, and so are

long character speeches like Mercutio's declamation on Queen Mab in *Romeo and Juliet*. The monologue had long been in use before Browning made it peculiarly his own by intensifying its revelation of the inner life. The monologue is in fact a miniature drama, stripped of stage accessories and of the elaborate machinery of dramatic plotting.

The monologue, like the regular drama, is the more successful in its presentation of men from the fact that it represents them by an actual living voice. No impersonal narrative can match the effectiveness of such dramatic voicing of the story. In fact good story-tellers resort to the device repeatedly, whether it be Uncle Remus or Mr. Dooley. The narrative of even Plutarch cannot rival the effect of the play of *Julius Cæsar* in dramatic presentation, nor can the subtlest exposition by critics equal the effect of the play of *Hamlet*. Living speech has countless innuendoes of meaning; intonation and inflection by the voice produce the finest shadings of thought or emotion. Browning's art therefore is to create such an imaginary human voice, and to call in all of the subtleties of the voice to his aid. This he does by clairvoyant power. The printed words are but symbols of the living voice, as the notes are but symbols of the movement of melody in music. The poem is not really alive until either actually or by power of imagination the reader hears this voice with all its subtle effects. Accidental betrayals of meaning will start from the text, giving the reader a sense of creative power, so that he seems to participate in the making of the poem as the performer does in the making of music. The failure to respond through the voice thus vitally to the dead letter-text of the printed page has made Browning unintelligible to many a reader.

We should bring to Browning that power we employ every day when we judge the character and feeling of those around us by what they say and their manner of saying it, when we let not a hesitation of voice, nor the stumble in a word escape our detective fancies.

Still further, Browning continually couples the term "dramatic" with his poetry to emphasize the aloofness of the speaker, with all his thoughts and sentiments, from the poet himself. Browning was concerned, not with revealing his own private life, but with what he had seen and found interesting in the world. He excluded his own personal experiences from his verse. The reader must therefore enter into the poem by exercise of his responsive dramatic imagination, putting himself into the lives and hearts of these imaginary men and women as Browning did before him, thinking their thoughts and feeling their passions. Just as in reading Shakespeare, we must submit for the time to this other person, even though he is loathsome to us. But this art must be practiced in realizing even a child's fairy story effectively.

A number of typical questions may serve to guide the requickening imagination to this dramatic personage and the poem as a whole. Who is the speaker? To whom is he speaking? Do his words, as so often in real life, imply or portray some third person not present and yet perhaps far more interesting than the speaker himself? What has occasioned the speech? Under what circumstances is it made? What story leads up to or away from this moment of speech? What is Browning's purpose in presenting such a speaker and such a speech? How has he adapted the form and movement of the poem to the speaker and the occasion? Not even tentative answers may be offered as we enter upon a poem for the first time, and we lose

much of what is said in our first reading, as we would in listening to a broken fragment of living speech on some new topic. But by repeated readings we come to understand this imaginary man or woman, and at last to comprehend the full meaning of the poet's utterance.

Our initial purpose must be to realize as far as possible the speaker. He may be the very heart of the poem, as in *The Italian in England*, or he may be an insignificant mouthpiece, as in the *Incident of the French Camp*. The dramatic intensity of the monologue is governed by the importance of his character. Where he sinks into a mere impersonal narrator, the poem loses the more significant features of monologue art. In *My Last Duchess* we realize with the very opening words that a great nobleman is speaking concerning his deceased wife. We read on from line to line, and the Duke's character gradually becomes manifest,—his cool, refined connoisseurship even over the portrait of his wife, his brutal, cynical resentment of her glad heartedness, the haughtiness which chooses "never to stoop," the relentless pride in the "nine-hundred-years-old name," which occasioned "commands," so that "all smiles stopped together," his studied unconcern about the dowry of his next Duchess, his flawless courtesy, altogether making him a genteel and highly cultured Bluebeard. In *The Flight of the Duchess*, the narrator is far less important in the poem as a whole; and in *How they Brought the Good News*, the speaker who rode the gallant Roland is purely secondary to his heroic horse. No definite rule governs the degree of the speaker's importance, but he is usually a key to the understanding of the poem.

There is also in most monologues a person spoken to; Browning rarely uses soliloquy. This person is usually without special significance and does not effect the course

of the speech. He is merely an open ear. Such dummy-listeners are less frequently found in the regular drama, which represents the active give-and-take between two or more minds. Browning, however, was willing to leave the listener colorless that he might reveal more deeply the heart of the speaker. Such listeners are found in the nameless "friend" of *The Flight of the Duchess*, in the aged mixer of poisons in *The Laboratory*, in the Athenian Council addressed by Pheidippides, in the friends of the Mermaid Tavern in *At the Mermaid*. But this listener may fade away until he is unidentifiable, as in the *Incident of the French Camp*, *Saul*, or *Rabbi Ben Ezra*.

Not infrequently some third absent person becomes clear in the speech, and may in fact be the very occasion of the speech, the author revealing a character indirectly by what another says about the one he really desires to reveal. This is practiced continually in the drama, as when the talk about Romeo introduces the audience to him before he appears on the stage. And in life we commonly draw our knowledge of absent and unknown people from the speech of another about them. The Duchess is undoubtedly the primary personage in *The Flight*, but we know her only through the speech of the old huntsman. Count Gismond and his rival Gautier appear only in the words of the wife who is speaking, and the lady in *The Glove* is seen through the words of Ronsard who tells her story. And at times, as in life everywhere, the listener draws by his own inference an entirely different impression of this absent character from the one held by the speaker. The reader utterly dissents from the Duke's estimate of his last Duchess, and feels that he has caught the truth of her character in spite of her husband's scorn.

Though persons are the prime interest in Browning's

monologues, there is usually a story, told very scantly save in a few narrative poems. Browning cares only for such incidents as reveal or affect the character and omits most of them, leaving the reader the fascinating task of reconstructing the story from scattered hints. The Duke does not tell the dark tragedy of his girl wife, but he excites the reader's imagination to fill out the whole course of it. Browning's readers often asked him what the "commands" were with which the story ends, but most readers prefer to fill in this last page for themselves. The Patriot does not give any connected account of his political career during his year of public service,—the gathering conspiracy against him, the open attack, the trial, and the condemnation all are hidden. In some of the monologues however there is scarcely a semblance of a story possible, as in *Up at a Villa*. Even when Browning tells a story at greater length, as in *Hervé Riel* and *The Flight of the Duchess*, he is far more concerned with the thought and feeling of the characters than with what they did, and seldom makes a good narrative from the standpoint of incident alone. *The Flight* is meager in incident as compared with a poem by Scott of the same length.

It is also necessary, though less importantly so, that the reader reconstruct the situation, the circumstances surrounding the speaker. In the stage drama this is done by stage accessories through the eye; but as we *read* the text of the drama in a book, our mind's eye must create all this pictorial background. This is necessary likewise, though not so importantly so, in the monologue, and such reconstruction must be made from apparently stray hints scattered through the poem. In *My Last Duchess* we can imagine a spacious sumptuously adorned gallery in the palace, with the Duke and his guest seated

before the curtained portrait. After the picture has been explained, the curtain is drawn, and speaker and listener pass together down the great stairway to join the company below, pausing for but a moment at the window on the landing to glance down at the splendid bronze fountain of Claus of Innsbruck. The situation may be vitally important to the understanding of the poem, as in *The Patriot*, *The Laboratory*, and *Love Among the Ruins*, or again it may be quite insignificant as in *Rabbi Ben Ezra* or *The Italian in England*. In the latter case, some situation in the story itself may assume importance in the poem, and may be vividly realized, as in the Italian's interview with the peasant woman who saved him, or the scene of the flinging of the glove, or Count Gismond's rescue of the Lady from the false accusation of Gautier.

When we have reconstructed character, story, and situation so that the monologue is thoroughly alive, we may ask what was the artistic purpose of the poet in presenting his picture. No stereotyped answer will serve here, for Browning's art motive varies widely. In earlier short poems, he seems to take pleasure in exhibiting frankly certain monstrosities of soul—the virulent monk in the *Spanish Cloister*, or the passionate lady in *The Laboratory*. Then there are the problem-monologues such as *The Glove*, where the poet seeks to fathom more truly some old tale. Or there is a desire to realize some character, which will epitomize a page of human history, as in *Cavalier Tunes* or *Pheidippides*, or some great truth of human nature, as that "love is best" in *Love Among the Ruins*, or the supreme values of life in *Rabbi Ben Ezra*. Or the poet may wish to tell a story, as in *The Flight of the Duchess*. Or he may wish to set forth some principle of art and of the artist's life, as in *At the Mermaid*, or some fun-

damental truth in Browning's view of the scheme of things, as in *Saul*. At times the motive may have nothing higher than a sense of grotesquerie or queerness, as in *Confessions*. Browning's purpose varies widely and incessantly. He is able to turn the monologue form to effectiveness in a hundred moods and purposes. Here again the student must form the habit of judging each new poem by its own effect, and must let it have its true effect naturally.

The style of the monologue is almost equally variable, for it is supposed to be living speech, controlled by the personality of the speaker. The formal, sustained style of undramatic literature would be bad style in that case. As in all dramatic speech, the true criterion of excellence is dramatic fidelity to the speaker, not stereotyped excellence of conventional good style. The old servitor tells the story of *The Flight of the Duchess* in rough, homely sincerity; Evelyn Hope's lover speaks in quiet, earnest control with the words of a cultured gentleman, while the shepherd poet-prophet David pours forth a style of glorious poetic beauty. Then as the mood of the speaker varies, the style will range widely; there is not sustained uniformity, but the bewildering variety of intense passionate speech. Still further, much is left imperfectly stated. There are broken sentences and interrupted thought. More is meant than is said; irony, innuendo, hidden meanings, tinge the style. Few poets have been more successful in the use of dramatic irony. The passionate flash of some fragment of a sentence may mean more than a whole formal stanza diluted to regularity. The reader may find in the very irregularities of manner, in the violences of style, a great deal of the secret of the poem.

Yet as in Shakespeare or in any other dramatic writer,

these various styles are dominated by the characteristic manner of the poet himself, the natural expression of his own personality. Browning has a vivid, living, untrammeled style, leaping rapidly from idea to idea, giving but slight heed to the graces of harmonious speech, and elliptical to an almost confusing extent. This style has proved difficult to many a reader, and the charge of obscurity has become proverbial against Browning.

That Browning is often obscure cannot be denied, and he has had to pay the penalty of alienating many a reader. Yet much of the best of Browning is readily intelligible to a person who reads with imagination. A brief statement of the more characteristic difficulties may assist materially the beginner. Chief of these is Browning's habit, due probably to the rapidity of his own mind, of eliding many of the smaller words of relationship which make language run smoothly, the relative pronoun, the article, the auxiliary verb as far as possible, and the conjunction. An alert, energetic reader readily supplies these elisions. The style thus gains in vividness and strength what it loses in ease and fluency and grace. Another difficulty lies in Browning's proneness to parentheses and digressions of thought, which break the flow of interpretation. Then there is a difficulty arising from casual references to little known facts of history and biography, or to unusual lore. Few poets do so much of this and it came naturally from the affluence of Browning's mind; he little realized that much that was known to him was unknown to his reader. Yet not infrequently these references may be left entirely unexplained without marring the dramatic effectiveness of the monologue. It adds little to the appreciation of the *Incident of the French Camp* to know the history of the storming of Ratisbon, and a knowledge of

the geography of the country between Ghent and Aix adds nothing to the appreciation of *Good News*. Finally, there is the difficulty arising from the lack of a stereotyped form and style, which renders each new poem a challenge to our understanding, and many minds have slight adaptiveness for this sort of work. These difficulties, genuine though they be, are not formidable to an active intelligence, and Browning is said to have declared that he had not written his poetry as a substitute for a lazy man's cigar. The difficulties vanish when honestly grappled.

There is abundant reward in the vigor and power, in the sense of personal mastery, in the insight, in the loftiness of spirit which characterize Browning, and few poets have taken such firm hold on their lovers and have entered so deeply into the making of character. So that to enter the work of Browning is to add a permanent personal resource to one's inner life.

DESCRIPTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Browning's Complete Works were published by Smith, Elder & Co. in sixteen volumes, and are republished in many forms, most convenient among which are the single volume editions published by Macmillan, Houghton Mifflin Company, and the Oxford Press. Browning himself made a selection from his poems for the press which has been issued frequently. "Everyman's Library" offers two serviceable volumes of selections. The plays have been edited and published separately several times, Rolfe's edition (Houghton Mifflin Company) being most readily obtainable.

The list of Browning's published volumes is as follows:—

1833. *Pauline.*
1835. *Paracelsus.*
1837. *Strafford.*
1840. *Sordello.*
1841–46. *Bells and Pomegranates*, including plays, dramatic lyrics, and dramatic romances.
1850. *Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day.*
1855. *Men and Women.*
1868–69. *The Ring and the Book.*
1871. *Balaustion's Adventure.*
1871. *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau.*
1872. *Fifine at the Fair.*
1873. *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country.*
1875. *Aristophanes' Apology.*
1875. *The Inn Album.*
1876. *Pacchiarotto and Other Poems.*
1877. *The Agamemnon of Æschylus.*
1878. *La Saisiaz.*
1878. *The Two Poets of Croisic.*
1879–80. *Dramatic Idylls.*
1883. *Jocoseria.*
1884. *Ferishtah's Fancies.*
1887. *Parleyings with Certain People.*
1889. *Asolando.*

POEMS OF

ROBERT BROWNING

"HOW THEY BROUGHT THE GOOD NEWS FROM GHENT TO AIX"

[16—]

I

I SPRANG to the stirrup, and Joris, and he;
I galloped, Dirck galloped, we galloped all three;
"Good speed!" cried the watch, as the gate-bolts undrew;
"Speed!" echoed the wall to us galloping through;
Behind shut the postern, the lights sank to rest,
And into the midnight we galloped abreast.

II

Not a word to each other; we kept the great pace
Neck by neck, stride by stride, never changing our place;
I turned in my saddle and made its girths tight,
Then shortened each stirrup, and set the pique right,
Rebuckled the cheek-strap, chained slacker the bit,
Nor galloped less steadily Roland a whit.

III

'T was moonset at starting; but while we drew near
Lokeren, the cocks crew and twilight dawned clear;
At Boom, a great yellow star came out to see;
At Düffeld, 't was morning as plain as could be;
And from Mecheln church-steeple we heard the half-chime,
So, Joris broke silence with, "Yet there is time!"

IV

At Aershot, up leaped of a sudden the sun,
And against him the cattle stood black every one,
To stare thro' the mist at us galloping past,
And I saw my stout galloper Roland at last,
With resolute shoulders, each butting away
The haze, as some bluff river headland its spray:

V

And his low head and crest, just one sharp ear bent back
For my voice, and the other pricked out on his track;
And one eye's black intelligence,—ever that glance
O'er its white edge at me, his own master, askance!
And the thick heavy spume-flakes which aye and anon
His fierce lips shook upwards in galloping on.

VI

By Hasselt, Dirck groaned; and cried Joris, "Stay spur!
Your Roos galloped bravely, the fault 's not in her,
We 'll remember at Aix"—for one heard the quick wheeze
Of her chest, saw the stretched neck and staggering knees,
And sunk tail, and horrible heave of the flank,
As down on her haunches she shuddered and sank.

VII

So, we were left galloping, Joris and I,
Past Looz and past Tongres, no cloud in the sky;
The broad sun above laughed a pitiless laugh,
'Neath our feet broke the brittle bright stubble like chaff;
Till over by Dalhem a dome-spire sprang white,
And "Gallop," gasped Joris, "for Aix is in sight!"

VIII

"How they 'll greet us!"—and all in a moment his roan
Rolled neck and croup over, lay dead as a stone;
And there was my Roland to bear the whole weight
Of the news which alone could save Aix from her fate,
With his nostrils like pits full of blood to the brim,
And with circles of red for his eye-sockets' rim.

IX

Then I cast loose my buffcoat, each holster let fall,
Shook off both my jack-boots, let go belt and all,
Stood up in the stirrup, leaned, patted his ear,
Called my Roland his pet-name, my horse without peer;
Clapped my hands, laughed and sang, any noise, bad or good,
Till at length into Aix Roland galloped and stood.

X

And all I remember is—friends flocking round
As I sat with his head 'twixt my knees on the ground;
And no voice but was praising this Roland of mine,
As I poured down his throat our last measure of wine,
Which (the burgesses voted by common consent)
Was no more than his due who brought good news from Ghent.

CAVALIER TUNES

I

MARCHING ALONG

I

KENTISH Sir Byng stood for his King,
Bidding the crop-headed Parliament swing:
And, pressing a troop unable to stoop
And see the rogues flourish and honest folk droop,
Marched them along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.

II

God for King Charles! Pym and such carles
To the Devil that prompts 'em their treasonous parles!
Cavaliers, up! Lips from the cup,
Hands from the pasty, nor bite take nor sup
Till you 're—
(*Chorus*) *Marching along, fifty-score strong,*
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.

III

Hampden to hell, and his obsequies' knell
Serve Hazelrig, Fiennes, and young Harry as well!
England, good cheer! Rupert is near!
Kentish and loyalists, keep we not here
(*Chorus*) *Marching along, fifty-score strong,*
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song?

IV

Then, God for King Charles! Pym and his snarls
To the Devil that pricks on such pestilent carles!
Hold by the right, you double your might;
So, onward to Nottingham, fresh for the fight,
(*Chorus*) *March we along, fifty-score strong,*
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song!

II

GIVE A ROUSE

I

KING CHARLES, and who 'll do him right now?
King Charles, and who 's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here 's, in hell's despite now,
King Charles!

II

Who gave me the goods that went since?
Who raised me the house that sank once?
Who helped me to gold I spent since?
Who found me in wine you drank once?
(*Chorus*) *King Charles, and who 'll do him right now?*
King Charles, and who 's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here 's, in hell's despite now,
King Charles!

III

To whom used my boy George quaff else,
By the old fool's side that begot him?
For whom did he cheer and laugh else,
While Noll's damned troopers shot him?

(*Chorus*) *King Charles, and who 'll do him right now?*
King Charles, and who 's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here 's, in hell's despite now,
King Charles!

III

BOOT AND SADDLE

I

Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!
Rescue my castle before the hot day
Brightens to blue from its silvery gray,
(*Chorus*) *Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!*

II

Ride past the suburbs, asleep as you 'd say;
Many 's the friend there, will listen and pray
"God's luck to gallants that strike up the lay—
(*Chorus*) "*Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!*"

III

Forty miles off, like a roebuck at bay,
Flouts Castle Brancepeth the Roundheads' array:
Who laughs, "Good fellows ere this, by my fay,
(*Chorus*) "*Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!*"

IV

Who? My wife Gertrude; that, honest and gay,
Laughs when you talk of surrendering, "Nay!
I 've better counsellors; what counsel they?"
(*Chorus*) "*Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!*"

WHY I AM A LIBERAL

"Why?" Because all I haply can and do,
All that I am now, all I hope to be,—
Whence comes it save from fortune setting free
Body and soul the purpose to pursue,
God traced for both? If fetters, not a few,
Of prejudice, convention, fall from me,
These shall I bid men—each in his degree
Also God-guided—bear, and gayly too?

But little do or can the best of us:
That little is achieved thro' Liberty.
Who then dares hold, emancipated thus,
His fellow shall continue bound? not I,
Who live, love, labor freely, nor discuss
A brother's right to freedom. That is "Why."

THE LOST LEADER

I

Just for a handful of silver he left us,
Just for a riband to stick in his coat—
Found the one gift of which fortune bereft us,
Lost all the others she lets us devote;
They, with the gold to give, doled him out silver,
So much was theirs who so little allowed:
How all our copper had gone for his service!
Rags—were they purple, his heart had been proud!
We that had loved him so, followed him, honored him,
Lived in his mild and magnificent eye,

Learned his great language, caught his clear accents,
Made him our pattern to live and to die!
Shakespeare was of us, Milton was for us,
Burns, Shelley, were with us,—they watch from their graves!
He alone breaks from the van and the freemen,
—He alone sinks to the rear and the slaves!

II

We shall march prospering,—not thro' his presence;
Songs may inspirit us,—not from his lyre;
Deeds will be done,—while he boasts his quiescence,
Still bidding crouch whom the rest bade aspire:
Blot out his name, then, record one lost soul more,
One task more declined, one more footpath untrod,
One more devil's-triumph and sorrow for angels,
One wrong more to man, one more insult to God!
Life's night begins: let him never come back to us!
There would be doubt, hesitation and pain,
Forced praise on our part—the glimmer of twilight,
Never glad confident morning again!
Best fight on well, for we taught him—strike gallantly,
Menace our heart ere we master his own;
Then let him receive the new knowledge and wait us,
Pardoned in heaven, the first by the throne!

THE PATRIOT

AN OLD STORY

I

It was roses, roses, all the way,
With myrtle mixed in my path like mad:
The house-roofs seemed to heave and sway,
The church-spires flamed, such flags they had,
A year ago on this very day.

II

The air broke into a mist with bells,
The old walls rocked with the crowd and cries.
Had I said, "Good folk, mere noise repels—
But give me your sun from yonder skies!"
They had answered, "And afterward, what else?"

III

Alack, it was I who leaped at the sun
To give it my loving friends to keep!
Naught man could do, have I left undone:
And you see my harvest, what I reap
This very day, now a year is run.

IV

There 's nobody on the house-tops now—
Just a palsied few at the windows set;
For the best of the sight is, all allow,
At the Shambles' Gate—or, better yet,
By the very scaffold's foot, I trow.

V

I go in the rain, and, more than needs,
A rope cuts both my wrists behind;
And I think, by the feel, my forehead bleeds,
For they fling, whoever has a mind,
Stones at me for my year's misdeeds.

VI

Thus I entered, and thus I go!
In triumphs, people have dropped down dead.
"Paid by the world, what dost thou owe
Me?"—God might question; now instead,
'T is God shall repay: I am safer so.

INCIDENT OF THE FRENCH CAMP

I

You know, we French stormed Ratisbon:
A mile or so away,
On a little mound, Napoleon
Stood on our storming-day;
With neck out-thrust, you fancy how,
Legs wide, arms locked behind,
As if to balance the prone brow
Oppressive with its mind.

II

Just as perhaps he mused "My plans
That soar, to earth may fall,
Let once my army-leader Lannes
Waver at yonder wall"—

Out 'twixt the battery-smokes there flew
A rider, bound on bound
Full-galloping; nor bridle drew
Until he reached the mound.

III

Then off there flung in smiling joy,
And held himself erect
By just his horse's mane, a boy:
You hardly could suspect—
(So tight he kept his lips compressed,
Scarce any blood came through)
You looked twice ere you saw his breast
Was all but shot in two.

IV

"Well," cried he, "Emperor, by God's grace
We 've got you Ratisbon!
The Marshal 's in the market-place,
And you 'll be there anon
To see your flag-bird flap his vans
Where I, to heart's desire,
Perched him!" The chief's eye flashed; his plans
Soared up again like fire.

V

The chief's eye flashed; but presently
Softened itself, as sheathes
A film the mother-eagle's eye
When her bruised eaglet breathes.
"You 're wounded!" "Nay," the soldier's pride
Touched to the quick, he said:
"I 'm killed, Sire!" And his chief beside,
Smiling the boy fell dead.

THE ITALIAN IN ENGLAND

That second time they hunted me
From hill to plain, from shore to sea,
And Austria, hounding far and wide
Her blood-hounds thro' the country-side,
Breathed hot and instant on my trace,—
I made six days a hiding-place
Of that dry green old aqueduct
Where I and Charles, when boys, have plucked
The fire-flies from the roof above,
Bright creeping thro' the moss they love:
—How long it seems since Charles was lost!
Six days the soldiers crossed and crossed
The country in my very sight;
And when that peril ceased at night,
The sky broke out in red dismay
With signal-fires; well, there I lay
Close covered o'er in my recess,
Up to the neck in ferns and cress,
Thinking on Metternich our friend,
And Charles's miserable end,
And much beside, two days; the third,
Hunger o'ercame me when I heard
The peasants from the village go
To work among the maize; you know,
With us in Lombardy, they bring
Provisions packed on mules, a string
With little bells that cheer their task,
And casks, and boughs on every cask
To keep the sun's heat from the wine;
These I let pass in jingling line,

And, close on them, dear noisy crew,
The peasants from the village, too;
For at the very rear would troop
Their wives and sisters in a group
To help, I knew. When these had passed,
I threw my glove to strike the last,
Taking the chance: she did not start,
Much less cry out, but stooped apart,
One instant rapidly glanced round,
And saw me beckon from the ground:
A wild bush grows and hides my crypt;
She picked my glove up while she stripped
A branch off, then rejoined the rest
With that; my glove lay in her breast.
Then I drew breath; they disappeared:
It was for Italy I feared.

An hour, and she returned alone
Exactly where my glove was thrown.
Meanwhile came many thoughts: on me
Rested the hopes of Italy.
I had devised a certain tale
Which, when 't was told her, could not fail
Persuade a peasant of its truth;
I meant to call a freak of youth
This hiding, and gives hopes of pay,
And no temptation to betray.
But when I saw that woman's face,
Its calm simplicity of grace,
Our Italy's own attitude
In which she walked thus far, and stood,
Planting each naked foot so firm,
To crush the snake and spare the worm—

At first sight of her eyes, I said,
"I am that man upon whose head
They fix the price, because I hate
The Austrians over us: the State
Will give you gold—oh, gold so much!—
If you betray me to their clutch,
And be your death, for aught I know,
If once they find you saved their foe.
Now, you must bring me food and drink,
And also paper, pen and ink,
And carry safe what I shall write
To Padua, which you 'll reach at night
Before the duomo shuts: go in,
And wait till Tenebræ begin;
Walk to the third confessional,
Between the pillar and the wall,
And kneeling whisper, *Whence comes peace?*
Say it a second time, then cease;
And if the voice inside returns,
From Christ and Freedom: what concerns
The cause of Peace?—for answer, slip
My letter where you placed your lip:
Then come back happy we have done
Our mother service—I, the son,
As you the daughter of our land!"

Three mornings more, she took her stand
In the same place, with the same eyes:
I was no surer of sun-rise
Than of her coming. We conferred
Of her own prospects, and I heard
She had a lover—stout and tall,
She said—then let her eyelids fall,

"He could do much"—as if some doubt
Entered her heart,—then, passing out,
"She could not speak for others, who
Had other thoughts; herself she knew:"
And so she brought me drink and food.
After four days, the scouts pursued
Another path; at last arrived
The help my Paduan friends contrived
To furnish me: she brought the news.
For the first time I could not choose
But kiss her hand, and lay my own
Upon her head—"This faith was shown
To Italy, our mother; she
Uses my hand and blesses thee."
She followed down to the sea-shore;
I left and never saw her more.

How very long since I have thought
Concerning—much less wished for—aught
Beside the good of Italy,
For which I live and mean to die!
I never was in love; and since
Charles proved false, what shall now convince
My inmost heart I have a friend?
However, if I pleased to spend
Real wishes on myself—say, three—
I know at least what one should be.
I would grasp Metternich until
I felt his red wet throat distil
In blood thro' these two hands. And next,
—Nor much for that am I perplexed—
Charles, perjured traitor, for his part,
Should die slow of a broken heart

Under his new employers. Last
—Ah, there, what should I wish? For fast
Do I grow old and out of strength.
If I resolved to seek at length
My father's house again, how scared
They all would look, and unprepared!
My brothers live in Austria's pay
—Disowned me long ago, men say:
And all my early mates who used
To praise me so—perhaps induced
More than one early step of mine—
Are turning wise: while some opine
"Freedom grows license," some suspect
"Haste breeds delay," and recollect
They always said, such premature
Beginnings never could endure!
So, with a sullen "All 's for best,"
The land seems settling to its rest.
I think then, I should wish to stand
This evening in that dear, lost land,
Over the sea the thousand miles,
And know if yet that woman smiles
With the calm smile; some little farm
She lives in there, no doubt: what harm
If I sat on the door-side bench,
And while her spindle made a trench
Fantastically in the dust,
Inquired of all her fortunes—just
Her children's ages and their names,
And what may be the husband's aims
For each of them. I 'd talk this out,
And sit there, for an hour about,

Then kiss her hand once more, and lay
Mine on her head, and go my way.

So much for idle wishing – how
It steals the time! To business now.

HERVÉ RIEL

I

On the sea and at the Hogue, sixteen hundred ninety-two
Did the English fight the French, – woe to France!
And, the thirty-first of May, helter-skelter thro' the blue,
Like a crowd of frightened porpoises a shoal of sharks pursue,
Came crowding ship on ship to Saint-Malo on the Rance,
With the English fleet in view.

II

'T was the squadron that escaped, with the victor in full chase;
First and foremost of the drove, in his great ship, Damfreville;
Close on him fled, great and small,
Twenty-two good ships in all;
And they signaled to the place
"Help the winners of a race!
Get us guidance, give us harbor, take us quick – or, quicker still,
Here 's the English can and will!"

III

Then the pilots of the place put out brisk and leapt on board;
"Why, what hope or chance have ships like these to pass?" laughed they:
"Rocks to starboard, rocks to port, all the passage scarred and scored,—
Shall the '*Formidable*' here, with her twelve and eighty guns,
Think to make the river-mouth by the single narrow way,
Trust to enter—where 't is ticklish for a craft of twenty tons,
And with flow at full beside?
Now, 't is slackest ebb of tide.
Reach the mooring? Rather say,
While rock stands or water runs,
Not a ship will leave the bay!"

IV

Then was called a council straight.
Brief and bitter the debate:
"Here 's the English at our heels; would you have them take in tow
All that 's left us of the fleet, linked together stern and bow,
For a prize to Plymouth Sound?
Better run the ships aground!"
(Ended Damfreville his speech).
Not a minute more to wait!
"Let the Captains all and each
Shove ashore, then blow up, burn the vessels on the beach!
France must undergo her fate.

V

"Give the word!" But no such word
Was ever spoke or heard;
For up stood, for out stepped, for in struck amid all these
—A Captain? A Lieutenant? A Mate—first, second, third?
No such man of mark, and meet
With his betters to compete!
But a simple Breton sailor pressed by Tourville for the fleet,
A poor coasting-pilot he, Hervé Riel the Croisickese.

VI

And, "What mockery or malice have we here?" cries Hervé Riel:
"Are you mad, you Malouins? Are you cowards, fools, or rogues?
Talk to me of rocks and shoals, me who took the soundings, tell
On my fingers every bank, every shallow, every swell
'Twixt the offing here and Grève where the river disembogues?
Are you bought by English gold? Is it love the lying 's for?
Morn and eve, night and day,
Have I piloted your bay,
Entered free and anchored fast at the foot of Solidor.
Burn the fleet and ruin France? That were worse than fifty Hogues!
Sirs, they know I speak the truth! Sirs, believe me there 's a way!
Only let me lead the line,

Have the biggest ship to steer,
Get this '*Formidable*' clear,
Make the others follow mine,
And I lead them, most and least, by a passage I know well,
Right to Solidor past Grève,
And there lay them safe and sound;
And if one ship misbehave,
—Keel so much as grate the ground,
Why, I 've nothing but my life,—here 's my head!" cries Hervé Riel.

VII

Not a minute more to wait.
"Steer us in, then, small and great!
Take the helm, lead the line, save the squadron!" cried its chief.
Captains, give the sailor place!
He is Admiral, in brief.
Still the north-wind, by God's grace!
See the noble fellow's face
As the big ship, with a bound,
Clears the entry like a hound,
Keeps the passage, as its inch of way were the wide sea's profound!
See, safe thro' shoal and rock,
How they follow in a flock,
Not a ship that misbehaves, not a keel that grates the ground,
Not a spar that comes to grief!
The peril, see, is past.
All are harbored to the last,
And just as Hervé Riel hollas "Anchor!"—sure as fate,
Up the English come,—too late!

VIII

So, the storm subsides to calm:
They see the green trees wave
On the heights o'erlooking Grève.
Hearts that bled are stanched with balm.
"Just our rapture to enhance,
Let the English rake the bay,
Gnash their teeth and glare askance
As they cannonade away!
'Neath rampired Solidor pleasant riding on the Rance!"
How hope succeeds despair on each Captain's countenance!
Out burst all with one accord,
"This is Paradise for Hell!
Let France, let France's King
Thank the man that did the thing!"
What a shout, and all one word,
"Hervé Riel!"
As he stepped in front once more,
Not a symptom of surprise
In the frank blue Breton eyes,
Just the same man as before.

IX

Then said Damfreville, "My friend,
I must speak out at the end,
Tho' I find the speaking hard.
Praise is deeper than the lips:
You have saved the King his ships,
You must name your own reward.
'Faith our sun was near eclipse!

Demand whate'er you will,
France remains your debtor still.
Ask to heart's content and have! or my name's not
Damfreville."

X

Then a beam of fun outbroke
On the bearded mouth that spoke,
As the honest heart laughed through
Those frank eyes of Breton blue:
"Since I needs must say my say,
Since on board the duty 's done,
And from Malo Roads to Croisic Point, what is it but
a run?—
Since 't is ask and have, I may—
Since the others go ashore—
Come! A good whole holiday!
Leave to go and see my wife, whom I call the Belle
Aurore!"
That he asked and that he got,—nothing more.

XI

Name and deed alike are lost:
Not a pillar nor a post
In his Croisic keeps alive the feat as it befell;
Not a head in white and black
On a single fishing smack,
In memory of the man but for whom had gone to wrack
All that France saved from the fight whence England
bore the bell.
Go to Paris: rank on rank
Search the heroes flung pell-mell
On the Louvre, face and flank!

You shall look long enough ere you come to Hervé Riel.
So, for better and for worse,
Hervé Riel, accept my verse!
In my verse, Hervé Riel, do thou once more
Save the squadron, honor France, love thy wife the Belle Aurore!

PHEIDIPPIDES

χαίρετε, νικῶμεν

First I salute this soil of the blessed, river and rock!
Gods of my birthplace, dæmons and heroes, honor to all!
Then I name thee, claim thee for our patron, co-equal in praise
—Ay, with Zeus the Defender, with Her of the ægis and spear!
Also, ye of the bow and the buskin, praised be your peer,
Now, henceforth and forever,—O latest to whom I upraise
Hand and heart and voice! For Athens, leave pasture and flock!
Present to help, potent to save, Pan—patron I call!

Archons of Athens, topped by the tettix, see, I return!
See, 't is myself here standing alive, no specter that speaks!
Crowned with the myrtle, did you command me, Athens and you,
"Run, Pheidippides, run and race, reach Sparta for aid!
Persia has come, we are here, where is She?" Your command I obeyed,
Ran and raced: like stubble, some field which a fire runs through,

Was the space between city and city: two days, two nights
did I burn
Over the hills, under the dales, down pits and up peaks.

Into their midst I broke: breath served but for "Persia has
come!
Persia bids Athens proffer slaves'-tribute, water and
earth;
Razed to the ground is Eretria—but Athens, shall Athens
sink,
Drop into dust and die—the flower of Hellas utterly die,
Die with the wide world spitting at Sparta, the stupid, the
stander-by?
Answer me quick, what help, what hand do you stretch o'er
destruction's brink?
How,—when? No care for my limbs!—there 's lightning
in all and some—
Fresh and fit your message to bear, once lips give it birth!"

O my Athens—Sparta love thee? Did Sparta respond?
Every face of her leered in a furrow of envy, mistrust,
Malice,—each eye of her gave me its glitter of gratified
hate!
Gravely they turned to take counsel, to cast for excuses.
I stood
Quivering,—the limbs of me fretting as fire frets, an inch
from dry wood:
"Persia has come, Athens asks aid, and still they debate?
Thunder, thou Zeus! Athené, are Spartans a quarry be-
yond
Swing of thy spear? Phoibos and Artemis, clang them
'Ye must'!"

No bolt launched from Olumpos! Lo, their answer at last!
"Has Persia come,—does Athens ask aid,—may Sparta befriend?
Nowise precipitate judgment—too weighty the issue at stake!
Count we no time lost time which lags thro' respect to the Gods!
Ponder that precept of old, 'No warfare, whatever the odds
In your favor, so long as the moon, half-orbed, is unable to take
Full-circle her state in the sky!' Already she rounds to it fast:
Athens must wait, patient as we—who judgment suspend."

Athens,—except for that sparkle,—thy name, I had mouldered to ash!
That sent a blaze thro' my blood; off, off and away was I back,
—Not one word to waste, one look to lose on the false and the vile!
Yet "O Gods of my land!" I cried, as each hillock and plain,
Wood and stream, I knew, I named, rushing past them again,
"Have ye kept faith, proved mindful of honors we paid you erewhile?
Vain was the filleted victim, the fulsome libation! Too rash
Love in its choice, paid you so largely service so slack!

"Oak and olive and bay,—I bid you cease to enwreathe
Brows made bold by your leaf! Fade at the Persian's foot,
You that, our patrons were pledged, should never adorn a slave!

Rather I hail thee, Parnes,—trust to thy wild waste tract!
Treeless, herbless, lifeless mountain! What matter if slacked
My speed may hardly be, for homage to crag and to cave
No deity deigns to drape with verdure?—at least I can
breathe,
Fear in thee no fraud from the blind, no lie from the mute!"

Such my cry as, rapid, I ran over Parnes' ridge;
Gully and gap I clambered and cleared till, sudden, a bar
Jutted, a stoppage of stone against me, blocking the way.
Right! for I minded the hollow to traverse, the fissure
across:
"Where I could enter, there I depart by! Night in the
fosse?
Athens to aid? Tho' the dive were thro' Erebos, thus I
obey—
Out of the day dive, into the day as bravely arise! No
bridge
Better!"—when—ha! what was it I came on, of wonders
that are?

There, in the cool of a cleft, sat he— majestical Pan!
Ivy drooped wanton, kissed his head, moss cushioned his
hoof:
All the great God was good in the eyes grave-kindly—the
curl
Carved on the bearded cheek, amused at a mortal's awe,
As, under the human trunk, the goat-thighs grand I saw.
"Halt, Pheidippides!"—halt I did, my brain of a whirl:
"Hither to me! Why pale in my presence?" he gracious
began:
"How is it,—Athens, only in Hellas, holds me aloof?

"Athens, she only, rears me no fane, makes me no feast!
Wherefore? Than I what godship to Athens more helpful of old?
Ay, and still, and forever her friend! Test Pan, trust me!
Go, bid Athens take heart, laugh Persia to scorn, have faith
In the temples and tombs! Go, say to Athens, 'The Goat-God saith:
When Persia—so much as strews not the soil—is cast in the sea,
Then praise Pan who fought in the ranks with your most and least,
Goat-thigh to greaved-thigh, made one cause with the free and the bold!'

"Say Pan saith: 'Let this, foreshowing the place, be the pledge!'"
(Gay, the liberal hand held out this herbage I bear
—Fennel,—I grasped it a-tremble with dew—whatever it bode),
"While, as for thee . . ." But enough! He was gone. If I ran hitherto—
Be sure that the rest of my journey, I ran no longer, but flew.
Parnes to Athens—earth no more, the air was my road:
Here am I back. Praise Pan, we stand no more on the razor's edge!
Pan for Athens, Pan for me! I too have a guerdon rare!

Then spoke Miltiades. "And thee, best runner of Greece,
Whose limbs did duty indeed,—what gift is promised thyself?

Tell it us straightway,—Athens the mother demands of her son!"
Rosily blushed the youth: he paused: but, lifting at length
His eyes from the ground, it seemed as he gathered the rest of his strength
Into the utterance—"Pan spoke thus: 'For what thou hast done
Count on a worthy reward! Henceforth be allowed thee release
From the racer's toil, no vulgar reward in praise or in pelf!'

"I am bold to believe, Pan means reward the most to my mind!
Fight I shall, with our foremost, wherever this fennel may grow,—
Pound—Pan helping us—Persia to dust, and, under the deep,
Whelm her away forever; and then,—no Athens to save,—
Marry a certain maid, I know keeps faith to the brave,—
Hie to my house and home: and, when my children shall creep
Close to my knees,—recount how the God was awful yet kind,
Promised their sire reward to the full—rewarding him—so!"

Unforseeing one! Yes, he fought on the Marathon day:
So, when Persia was dust, all cried "To Akropolis!
Run, Pheidippides, one race more! the meed is thy due!
'Athens is saved, thank Pan,' go shout!" He flung down his shield,
Ran like fire once more: and the space 'twixt the Fennel-field

And Athens was stubble again, a field which a fire runs through,
Till in he broke: "Rejoice, we conquer!" Like wine through clay,
Joy in his blood bursting his heart, he died—the bliss!

So, to this day, when friend meets friend, the word of salute
Is still "Rejoice!"—his word which brought rejoicing indeed.
So is Pheidippides happy forever,—the noble strong man
Who could race like a god, bear the face of a god, whom a god loved so well;
He saw the land saved he had helped to save, and was suffered to tell
Such tidings, yet never decline, but, gloriously as he began,
So to end gloriously—once to shout, thereafter be mute:
"Athens is saved!"—Pheidippides dies in the shout for his meed.

HOME THOUGHTS FROM ABROAD

Oh, to be in England now that April 's there,
And whoever wakes in England sees, some morning, unaware,
That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough
In England—now!

And after April, when May follows,
And the white-throat builds, and all the swallows!

Hark, where my blossomed pear-tree in the hedge
Leans to the field and scatters on the clover
Blossoms and dewdrops—at the bent spray's edge—
That 's the wise thrush: he sings each song twice over
Lest you should think he never could recapture
The first fine careless rapture!
And, tho' the fields look rough with hoary dew,
All will be gay when noontide wakes anew
The buttercups, the little children's dower
—Far brighter than this gaudy melon-flower!

HOME THOUGHTS FROM THE SEA

Nobly, nobly Cape St. Vincent to the Northwest died away;
Sunset ran, one glorious blood-red, reeking into Cadiz Bay;
Bluish 'mid the burning water, full in face Trafalgar lay;
In the dimmest North-east distance dawned Gibraltar grand and gray;
"Here and here did England help me: how can I help England?"—say,
Who so turns as I, this evening, turn to God to praise and pray,
While Jove's planet rises yonder, silent over Africa.

UP AT A VILLA—DOWN IN THE CITY

(AS DISTINGUISHED BY AN ITALIAN PERSON OF QUALITY)

I

Had I but plenty of money, money enough and to spare,
The house for me, no doubt, were a house in the city-square;
Ah, such a life, such a life, as one leads at the window there!

II

Something to see, by Bacchus, something to hear, at least!
There, the whole day long, one's life is a perfect feast;
While up at a villa one lives, I maintain it, no more than a beast.

III

Well now, look at our villa! stuck like the horn of a bull
Just on a mountain-edge as bare as the creature's skull,
Save a mere shag of a bush with hardly a leaf to pull!
—I scratch my own, sometimes, to see if the hair 's turned wool.

IV

But the city, oh the city—the square with the houses! Why?
They are stone-faced, white as a curd, there 's something to take the eye!
Houses in four straight lines, not a single front awry;
You watch who crosses and gossips, who saunters, who hurries by;
Green blinds, as a matter of course, to draw when the sun gets high;
And the shops with fanciful signs which are painted properly.

V

What of a villa? Tho' winter be over in March by rights,
'T is May perhaps ere the snow shall have withered well off the heights:
You 've the brown ploughed land before, where the oxen steam and wheeze,
And the hills over-smoked behind by the faint gray olive-trees.

VI

Is it better in May, I ask you? You 've summer all at once;
In a day he leaps complete with a few strong April suns.
'Mid the sharp short emerald wheat, scarce risen three fingers well,
The wild tulip, at end of its tube, blows out its great red bell
Like a thin clear bubble of blood, for the children to pick and sell.

VII

Is it ever hot in the square? There 's a fountain to spout and splash!
In the shade it sings and springs; in the shine such foam-bows flash
On the horses with curling fish-tails, that prance and paddle and pash
Round the lady atop in her conch—fifty gazers do not abash,
Tho' all that she wears is some weeds round her waist in a sort of sash.

VIII

All the year long at the villa, nothing to see though you linger,
Except yon cypress that points like death's lean lifted forefinger.
Some think fireflies pretty, when they mix i' the corn and mingle,
Or thrid the stinking hemp till the stalks of it seem a-tingle.

Late August or early September, the stunning cicala is
shrill,
And the bees keep their tiresome whine round the resinous
firs on the hill.
Enough of the seasons,—I spare you the months of the
fever and chill.

IX

Ere you open your eyes in the city, the blessed church-
bells begin:
No sooner the bells leave off than the diligence rattles in:
You get the pick of the news, and it costs you never a pin.
By and by there 's the traveling doctor gives pills, lets
blood, draws teeth;
Or the Pulcinello-trumpet breaks up the market beneath.
At the post-office such a scene-picture—the new play, pip-
ing hot!
And a notice how, only this morning, three liberal thieves
were shot.
Above it, behold the Archbishop's most fatherly of rebukes,
And beneath, with his crown and his lion, some little new
law of the Duke's!
Or a sonnet with flowery marge, to the Reverend Don So-
and-so
Who is Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarca, St. Jerome and Cicero,
"And moreover," (the sonnet goes rhyming,) "the skirts
of St. Paul has reached,
Having preached us those six Lent-lectures more unctuous
than ever he preached."
Noon strikes,—here sweeps the procession! our Lady borne
smiling and smart
With a pink gauze gown all spangles, and seven swords
stuck in her heart!

Bang-whang-whang goes the drum, *tootle-te-tootle* the fife;
No keeping one's haunches still: it 's the greatest pleasure in life.

X

But bless you, it 's dear—it 's dear! fowls, wine, at double the rate.
They have clapped a new tax upon salt, and what oil pays passing the gate
It 's a horror to think of. And so, the villa for me, not the city!
Beggars can scarcely be choosers: but still—ah, the pity, the pity!
Look, two and two go the priests, then the monks with cowls and sandals,
And the penitents dressed in white shirts, a-holding the yellow candles;
One, he carries a flag up straight, and another a cross with handles,
And the Duke's guard brings up the rear, for the better prevention of scandals:
Bang-whang-whang goes the drum, *tootle-te-tootle* the fife.
Oh, a day in the city-square, there is no such pleasure in life!

CONFESSIONS

I

What is he buzzing in my ears?
"Now that I come to die,
Do I view the world as a vale of tears?"
Ah, reverend sir, not I!

II

What I viewed there once, what I view again
Where the physic bottles stand
On the table's edge,—is a suburb lane,
With a wall to my bedside hand.

III

That lane sloped, much as the bottles do,
From a house you could descry
O'er the garden-wall: is the curtain blue
Or green to a healthy eye?

IV

To mine, it serves for the old June weather
Blue above lane and wall;
And that farthest bottle labeled "Ether"
Is the house o'er-topping all.

V

At a terrace, somewhere near the stopper,
There watched for me, one June,
A girl: I know, sir, it 's improper,
My poor mind 's out of tune

VI

Only, there was a way . . . you crept
  Close by the side, to dodge
Eyes in the house, two eyes except:
  They styled their house "The Lodge."

VII

What right had a lounger up their lane?
  But, by creeping very close,
With the good wall's help,—their eyes might strain
  And stretch themselves to Oes,

VIII

Yet never catch her and me together,
  As she left the attic, there,
By the rim of the bottle labeled "Ether,"
  And stole from stair to stair,

IX

And stood by the rose-wreathed gate. Alas,
  We loved, sir—used to meet:
How sad and bad and mad it was—
  But then, how it was sweet!

A FACE

If one could have that little head of hers
Painted upon a background of pale gold,
Such as the Tuscan's early art prefers!
No shade encroaching on the matchless mould
Of those two lips, which should be opening soft
In the pure profile; not as when she laughs,
For that spoils all: but rather as if aloft

Yon hyacinth, she loves so, leaned its staff's
Burthen of honey-colored buds, to kiss
And capture 'twixt the lips apart for this.
Then her lithe neck, three fingers might surround,
How it should waver, on the pale gold ground,
Up to the fruit-shaped, perfect chin it lifts!
I know, Correggio loves to mass, in rifts
Of heaven, his angel faces, orb on orb
Breaking its outline, burning shades absorb:
But these are only massed there, I should think,
Waiting to see some wonder momently
Grow out, stand full, fade slow against the sky,
(That 's the pale ground you 'd see this sweet face by)
All heaven, meanwhile, condensed into one eye
Which fears to lose the wonder, should it wink.

EVELYN HOPE

I

Beautiful Evelyn Hope is dead!
Sit and watch by her side an hour.
That is her book-shelf, this her bed;
She plucked that piece of geranium-flower,
Beginning to die too, in the glass;
Little has yet been changed, I think:
The shutters are shut, no light may pass
Save two long rays thro' the hinge's chink.

II

Sixteen years old when she died!
Perhaps she had scarcely heard my name;
It was not her time to love; beside,
Her life had many a hope and aim.

Duties enough and little cares,
And now was quiet, now astir,
Till God's hand beckoned unawares,—
And the sweet white brow is all of her.

III

Is it too late then, Evelyn Hope?
What, your soul was pure and true,
The good stars met in your horoscope,
Made you of spirit, fire and dew—
And, just because I was thrice as old
And our paths in the world diverged so wide,
Each was naught to each, must I be told?
We were fellow mortals, naught beside?

IV

No, indeed! for God above
Is great to grant, as mighty to make,
And creates the love to reward the love:
I claim you still, for my own love's sake!
Delayed it may be for more lives yet,
Thro' worlds I shall traverse, not a few:
Much is to learn, much to forget
Ere the time be come for taking you.

V

But the time will come,—at last it will,
When, Evelyn Hope, what meant (I shall say)
In the lower earth, in the years long still,
That body and soul so pure and gay?
Why your hair was amber, I shall divine,
And your mouth of your own geranium's red—
And what you would do with me, in fine,
In the new life come in the old one's stead.

VI

I have lived (I shall say) so much since then,
Given up myself so many times,
Gained me the gains of various men,
Ransacked the ages, spoiled the climes;
Yet one thing, one, in my soul's full scope,
Either I missed or itself missed me:
And I want and find you, Evelyn Hope!
What is the issue? let us see!

VII

I loved you, Evelyn, all the while
My heart seemed full as it could hold;
There was place and to spare for the frank young smile,
And the red young mouth, and the hair's young gold.
So hush,—I will give you this leaf to keep:
See, I shut it inside the sweet cold hand!
There, that is our secret: go to sleep!
You will wake, and remember, and understand.

LOVE AMONG THE RUINS

I

Where the quiet-colored end of evening smiles,
Miles and miles
On the solitary pastures where our sheep
Half-asleep
Tinkle homeward thro' the twilight, stray or stop
As they crop—
Was the site once of a city great and gay,
(So they say)

Of our country's very capital, its prince
Ages since
Held his court in, gathered councils, wielding far
Peace or war.

II

Now,—the country does not even boast a tree
As you see,
To distinguish slopes of verdure, certain rills
From the hills
Intersect and give a name to, (else they run
Into one)
Where the domed and daring palace shot its spires
Up like fires
O'er the hundred-gated circuit of a wall
Bounding all,
Made of marble, men might march on nor be pressed,
Twelve abreast.

III

And such plenty and perfection, see, of grass
Never was!
Such a carpet as, this summer-time, o'erspreads
And embeds
Every vestige of the city, guessed alone,
Stock or stone—
Where a multitude of men breathed joy and woe
Long ago;
Lust of glory pricked their hearts up, dread of shame
Struck them tame;
And that glory and that shame alike, the gold
Bought and sold.

IV

Now,—the single little turret that remains
On the plains,
By the caper overrooted, by the gourd
Overscored,
While the patching houseleek's head of blossom winks
Thro' the chinks—
Marks the basement whence a tower in ancient time
Sprang sublime,
And a burning ring, all round, the chariots traced
As they raced,
And the monarch and his minions and his dames
Viewed the games.

V

And I know—while thus the quiet-colored eve
Smiles to leave
To their folding, all our many tinkling fleece
In such peace,
And the slopes and rills in undistinguished gray
Melt away—
That a girl with eager eyes and yellow hair
Waits me there
In the turret whence the charioteers caught soul
For the goal,
When the king looked, where she looks now, breathless, dumb
Till I come.

VI

But he looked upon the city, every side,
Far and wide,
All the mountains topped with temples, all the glades'
Colonnades,

All the causeys, bridges, aqueducts,—and then,
All the men!
When I do come, she will speak not, she will stand,
Either hand
On my shoulder, give her eyes the first embrace
Of my face,
Ere we rush, ere we extinguish sight and speech
Each on each.

VII

In one year they sent a million fighters forth
South and North,
And they built their gods a brazen pillar high
As the sky,
Yet reserved a thousand chariots in full force—
Gold, of course.
Oh heart! oh blood that freezes, blood that burns!
Earth's returns
For whole centuries of folly, noise and sin!
Shut them in,
With their triumphs and their glories and the rest!
Love is best.

ONE WORD MORE

TO E. B. B.

1855

I

THERE they are, my fifty men and women
Naming me the fifty poems finished!
Take them, Love, the book and me together:
Where the heart lies, let the brain lie also.

II

Rafael made a century of sonnets,
Made and wrote them in a certain volume
Dinted with the silver-pointed pencil
Else he only used to draw Madonnas:
These, the world might view—but one, the volume.
Who that one, you ask? Your heart instructs you.
Did she live and love it all her life-time?
Did she drop, his lady of the sonnets,
Die, and let it drop beside her pillow
Where it lay in place of Rafael's glory,
Rafael's cheek so duteous and so loving—
Cheek, the world was wont to hail a painter's,
Rafael's cheek, her love had turned a poet's?

III

You and I would rather read that volume,
(Taken to his beating bosom by it)
Lean and list the bosom-beats of Rafael,
Would we not? than wonder at Madonnas—
Her, San Sisto names, and Her, Foligno,
Her, that visits Florence in a vision,
Her, that 's left with lilies in the Louvre—
Seen by us and all the world in circle.

IV

You and I will never read that volume.
Guido Reni, like his own eye's apple
Guarded long the treasure-book and loved it.
Guido Reni dying, all Bologna
Cried, and the world cried too, "Ours, the treasure!"
Suddenly, as rare things will, it vanished.

V

Dante once prepared to paint an angel:
Whom to please? You whisper "Beatrice."
While he mused and traced it and retraced it,
(Peradventure with a pen corroded
Still by drops of that hot ink he dipped for,
When, his left-hand i' the hair o' the wicked,
Back he held the brow and pricked its stigma,
Bit into the live man's flesh for parchment,
Loosed him, laughed to see the writing rankle,
Let the wretch go festering through Florence)—
Dante, who loved well because he hated,
Hated wickedness that hinders loving,
Dante standing, studying his angel,—
In there broke the folk of his Inferno.
Says he—"Certain people of importance
(Such he gave his daily dreadful line to)
"Entered and would seize, forsooth, the poet."
Says the poet—"Then I stopped my painting."

VI

You and I would rather see that angel,
Painted by the tenderness of Dante,
Would we not?—than read a fresh Inferno.

VII

You and I will never see that picture.
While he mused on love and Beatrice,
While he softened o'er his outlined angel,
In they broke, those "people of importance:"
We and Bice bear the loss forever.

VIII

What of Rafael's sonnets, Dante's picture?
This: no artist lives and loves, that longs not
Once, and only once, and for one only,
(Ah, the prize!) to find his love a language
Fit and fair and simple and sufficient—
Using nature that 's an art to others,
Not, this one time, art that 's turned his nature.
Ay of all the artists living, loving,
None but would forego his proper dowry,—
Does he paint? he fain would write a poem,—
Does he write? he fain would paint a picture,
Put to proof art alien to the artist's,
Once, and only once, and for one only,
So to be the man and leave the artist,
Gain the man's joy, miss the artist's sorrow.

IX

Wherefore? Heaven's gift takes earth's abatement!
He who smites the rock and spreads the water,
Bidding drink and live a crowd beneath him,
Even he, the minute makes immortal,
Proves, perchance, but mortal in the minute,
Desecrates, belike, the deed in doing.
While he smites, how can he but remember,
So he smote before, in such a peril,
When they stood and mocked—"Shall smiting help us?"
When they drank and sneered—"A stroke is easy!"
When they wiped their mouths and went their journey,
Throwing him for thanks—"But drought was pleasant."
Thus old memories mar the actual triumph;
Thus the doing savors of disrelish;

Thus achievement lacks a gracious somewhat;
O'er-importuned brows becloud the mandate,
Carelessness or consciousness—the gesture.
For he bears an ancient wrong about him,
Sees and knows again those phalanxed faces,
Hears, yet one time more, the 'customed prelude—
"How shouldst thou, of all men, smite, and save us?"
Guesses what is like to prove the sequel—
"Egypt's flesh-pots—nay, the drought was better."

X

Oh, the crowd must have emphatic warrant!
Theirs, the Sinai-forehead's cloven brilliance,
Right-arm's rod-sweep, tongue's imperial fiat.
Never dares the man put off the prophet.

XI

Did he love one face from out the thousands,
(Were she Jethro's daughter, white and wifely,
Were she but the Æthiopian bondslave,)
He would envy yon dumb patient camel,
Keeping a reserve of scanty water
Meant to save his own life in the desert;
Ready in the desert to deliver
(Kneeling down to let his breast be opened)
Hoard and life together for his mistress.

XII

I shall never, in the years remaining,
Paint you pictures, no, nor carve you statues,
Make you music that should all-express me;
So it seems: I stand on my attainment.

This of verse alone, one life allows me;
Verse and nothing else have I to give you.
Other heights in other lives, God willing:
All the gifts from all the heights, your own, Love!

XIII

Yet a semblance of resource avails us—
Shade so finely touched, love's sense must seize it.
Take these lines, look lovingly and nearly,
Lines I write the first time and the last time.
He who works in fresco, steals a hair-brush,
Curbs the liberal hand, subservient proudly,
Cramps his spirit, crowds its all in little,
Makes a strange art of an art familiar,
Fills his lady's missal-marge with flowerets.
He who blows thro' bronze, may breathe thro' silver,
Fitly serenade a slumbrous princess.
He who writes, may write for once as I do.

XIV

Love, you saw me gather men and women,
Live or dead or fashioned by my fancy,
Enter each and all, and use their service,
Speak from every mouth,—the speech, a poem.
Hardly shall I tell my joys and sorrows,
Hopes and fears, belief and disbelieving:
I am mine and yours—the rest be all men's,
Karshish, Cleon, Norbert and the fifty.
Let me speak this once in my true person,
Not as Lippo, Roland or Andrea,
Though the fruit of speech be just this sentence:
Pray you, look on these my men and women,
Take and keep my fifty poems finished;

Where my heart lies, let my brain lie also!
Poor the speech; be how I speak, for all things.

XV

Not but that you know me! Lo, the moon's self!
Here in London, yonder late in Florence,
Still we find her face, the thrice-transfigured.
Curving on a sky imbrued with color,
Drifted over Fiesole by twilight,
Came she, our new crescent of a hair's-breadth.
Full she flared it, lamping Samminiato,
Rounder 'twixt the cypresses and rounder,
Perfect till the nightingales applauded.
Now, a piece of her old self, impoverished,
Hard to greet, she traverses the house-roofs,
Hurries with unhandsome thrift of silver,
Goes dispiritedly, glad to finish.

XVI

What, there 's nothing in the moon noteworthy?
Nay: for if that moon could love a mortal,
Use, to charm him (so to fit a fancy),
All her magic ('tis the old sweet mythos),
She would turn a new side to her mortal,
Side unseen of herdsman, huntsman, steersman—
Blank to Zoroaster on his terrace,
Blind to Galileo on his turret,
Dumb to Homer, dumb to Keats—him, even!
Think, the wonder of the moonstruck mortal—
When she turns round, comes again in heaven,
Opens out anew for worse or better!
Proves she like some portent of an iceberg

Swimming full upon the ship it founders,
Hungry with huge teeth of splintered crystals?
Proves she as the paved work of a sapphire
Seen by Moses when he climbed the mountain?
Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu
Climbed and saw the very God, the Highest,
Stand upon the paved work of a sapphire.
Like the bodied heaven in his clearness
Shone the stone, the sapphire of that paved work,
When they ate and drank and saw God also!

XVII

What were seen? None knows, none ever shall know.
Only this is sure—the sight were other,
Not the moon's same side, born late in Florence,
Dying now impoverished here in London.
God be thanked, the meanest of his creatures
Boasts two soul-sides, one to face the world with,
One to show a woman when he loves her!

XVIII

This I say of me, but think of you, Love!
This to you—yourself my moon of poets!
Ah, but that 's the world's side, there 's the wonder,
Thus they see you, praise you, think they know you!
There, in turn I stand with them and praise you—
Out of my own self, I dare to phrase it.
But the best is when I glide from out them,
Cross a step or two of dubious twilight,
Come out on the other side, the novel
Silent silver lights and darks undreamed of,
Where I hush and bless myself with silence.

XIX

Oh, their Rafael of the dear Madonnas,
Oh, their Dante of the dread Inferno,
Wrote one song—and in my brain I sing it,
Drew one angel—borne, see, on my bosom!

MY STAR

All that I know
Of a certain star
Is, it can throw
(Like the angled spar)
Now a dart of red,
Now a dart of blue;
Till my friends have said
They would fain see, too,
My star that dartles the red and the blue!
Then it stops like a bird; like a flower, hangs furled:
They must solace themselves with the Saturn above it.
What matter to me if their star is a world?
Mine has opened its soul to me; therefore I love it.

JAMES LEE'S WIFE

ON THE CLIFF

I

I leaned on the turf,
I looked at a rock
Left dry by the surf;
For the turf, to call it grass were to mock:
Dead to the roots, so deep was done
The work of the summer sun.

II

And the rock lay flat
As an anvil's face:
No iron like that!
Baked dry: of a weed, of a shell, no trace:
Sunshine outside, but ice at the core,
Death's altar by the lone shore.

III

On the turf, sprang gay
With his films of blue,
No cricket, I 'll say,
But a war-horse, barded and chanfroned too,
The gift of a quixote-mage to his knight,
Real fairy, with wings all right.

IV

On the rock, they scorch
Like a drop of fire
From a brandished torch,
Fall two red fans of a butterfly:
No turf, no rock,—in their ugly stead,
See, wonderful blue and red!

V

Is it not so
With the minds of men?
The level and low,
The burnt and bare, in themselves; but then
With such a blue and red grace, not theirs,—
Love settling unawares!

SONG

I

Nay but you, who do not love her,
Is she not pure gold, my mistress?
Holds earth aught—speak truth—above her?
Aught like this tress, see, and this tress,
And this last fairest tress of all,
So fair, see, ere I let it fall?

II

Because, you spend your lives in praising;
To praise, you search the wide world over:
Then why not witness, calmly gazing,
If earth holds aught—speak truth—above her?
Above this tress, and this, I touch
But cannot praise, I love so much!

SUMMUM BONUM

All the breath and the bloom of the year in the bag of one bee:
All the wonder and wealth of the mine in the heart of one gem:
In the core of one pearl all the shade and the shine of the sea:
Breath and bloom, shade and shine,—wonder, wealth, and—how far above them—
Truth, that 's brighter than gem,
Trust, that 's purer than pearl,—
Brightest truth, purest trust in the universe—all were for me
In the kiss of one girl.

THE LABORATORY

ANCIEN RÉGIME

I

Now that I, tying thy glass mask tightly,
May gaze thro' these faint smokes curling whitely,
As thou pliest thy trade in this devil's-smithy—
Which is the poison to poison her, prithee?

II

He is with her, and they know that I know
Where they are, what they do: they believe my tears flow
While they laugh, laugh at me, at me fled to the drear
Empty church, to pray God in, for them!—I am here.

III

Grind away, moisten and mash up thy paste,
Pound at thy powder,—I am not in haste!
Better sit thus, and observe thy strange things,
Than go where men wait me, and dance at the King's.

IV

That in the mortar—you call it a gum?
Ah, the brave tree whence such gold oozings come!
And yonder soft phial, the exquisite blue,
Sure to taste sweetly,—is that poison too?

V

Had I but all of them, thee and thy treasures,
What a wild crowd of invisible pleasures!
To carry pure death in an earring, a casket,
A signet, a fan-mount, a filigree basket!

VI

Soon, at the King's, a mere lozenge to give
And Pauline should have just thirty minutes to live!
But to light a pastile, and Elise, with her head
And her breast and her arms and her hands, should drop dead!

VII

Quick—is it finished? The color 's too grim!
Why not soft like the phial's, enticing and dim?
Let it brighten her drink, let her turn it and stir,
And try it and taste, ere she fix and prefer!

VIII

What a drop! She 's not little, no minion like me!
That 's why she ensnared him: this never will free
The soul from those masculine eyes,—say, "No!"
To that pulse's magnificent come-and-go.

IX

For only last night, as they whispered, I brought
My own eyes to bear on her so, that I thought
Could I keep them one half minute fixed, she would fall
Shrivelled; she fell not; yet this does it all!

X

Not that I bid you spare her the pain;
Let death be felt and the proof remain:
Brand, burn up, bite into its grace—
He is sure to remember her dying face!

XI

Is it done? Take my mask off! Nay, be not morose;
It kills her, and this prevents seeing it close:
The delicate droplet, my whole fortune's fee!
If it hurts her, beside, can it ever hurt me?

XII

Now, take all my jewels, gorge gold to your fill,
You may kiss me, old man, on my mouth if you will!
But brush this dust off me, lest horror it brings
Ere I know it—next moment I dance at the King's!

COUNT GISMOND

AIX IN PROVENCE

I

Christ God who savest man, save most
Of men Count Gismond who saved me!
Count Gauthier, when he chose his post,
Chose time and place and company
To suit it; when he struck at length
My honor, 't was with all his strength.

II

And doubtlessly ere he could draw
All points to one, he must have schemed!
That miserable morning saw
Few half so happy as I seemed,
While being dressed in queen's array
To give our tourney prize away.

III

I thought they loved me, did me grace
To please themselves; 't was all their deed;
God makes, or fair or foul, our face;
If showing mine so caused to bleed
My cousins' hearts, they should have dropped
A word, and straight the play had stopped.

IV

They, too, so beauteous! Each a queen
By virtue of her brow and breast;
Not needing to be crowned, I mean,
As I do. E'en when I was dressed,
Had either of them spoke, instead
Of glancing sideways with still head!

V

But no: they let me laugh, and sing
My birthday song quite through, adjust
The last rose in my garland, fling
A last look on the mirror, trust
My arms to each an arm of theirs,
And so descend the castle-stairs—

VI

And come out on the morning troop
Of merry friends who kissed my cheek,
And called me queen, and made me stoop
Under the canopy—(a streak
That pierced it, of the outside sun,
Powdered with gold its gloom's soft dun)—

VII

And they could let me take my state
  And foolish throne amid applause
Of all come there to celebrate
  My queen's-day—Oh I think the cause
Of much was, they forgot no crowd
Makes up for parents in their shroud!

VIII

However that be, all eyes were bent
  Upon me, when my cousins cast
Theirs down; 't was time I should present
  The victor's crown, but . . . there, 't will last
No long time . . . the old mist again
Blinds me as then it did. How vain!

IX

See! Gismond 's at the gate, in talk
  With his two boys: I can proceed.
Well, at that moment, who should stalk
  Forth boldly—to my face, indeed—
But Gauthier, and he thundered "Stay!"
And all stayed. "Bring no crowns, I say!

X

"Bring torches! Wind the penance-sheet
  About her! Let her shun the chaste,
Or lay herself before their feet!
  Shall she whose body I embraced
A night long, queen it in the day?
For honor's sake no crowns, I say!"

XI

I? What I answered? As I live,
I never fancied such a thing
An answer possible to give.
What says the body when they spring
Some monstrous torture-engine's whole
Strength on it? No more says the soul.

XII

Till out strode Gismond; then I knew
That I was saved. I never met
His face before, but, at first view,
I felt quite sure that God had set
Himself to Satan: who would spend
A minute's mistrust on the end?

XIII

He strode to Gauthier, in his throat
Gave him the lie, then struck his mouth
With one back-handed blow that wrote
In blood men's verdict there. North, South,
East, West, I looked. The lie was dead,
And damned, and truth stood up instead.

XIV

This glads me most, that I enjoyed
The heart of the joy, with my content
In watching Gismond unalloyed
By any doubt of the event:
God took that on him—I was bid
Watch Gismond for my part: I did.

XV

Did I not watch him while he let
His armorer just brace his greaves,
Rivet his hauberk, on the fret
The while! His foot . . . my memory leaves
No least stamp out, nor how anon
He pulled his ringing gauntlets on.

XVI

And e'en before the trumpet's sound
Was finished, prone lay the false knight,
Prone as his lie, upon the ground:
Gismond flew at him, used no sleight
O' the sword, but open-breasted drove,
Cleaving till out the truth he clove.

XVII

Which done, he dragged him to my feet
And said, "Here die, but end thy breath
In full confession, lest thou fleet
From my first, to God's second death!
Say, hast thou lied?" And, "I have lied
To God and her," he said, and died.

XVIII

Then Gismond, kneeling to me, asked
—What safe my heart holds, though no word
Could I repeat now, if I tasked
My powers forever, to a third
Dear even as you are. Pass the rest
Until I sank upon his breast.

XIX

Over my head his arm he flung
  Against the world; and scarce I felt
His sword (that dripped by me and swung)
  A little shifted in its belt:
For he began to say the while
How South our home lay many a mile.

XX

So, 'mid the shouting multitude
  We two walked forth to never more
Return. My cousins have pursued
  Their life, untroubled as before
I vexed them. Gauthier's dwelling-place
God lighten! May his soul find grace!

XXI

Our elder boy has got the clear
  Great brow; tho' when his brother's black
Full eye shows scorn, it . . . Gismond here?
  And have you brought my tercel back?
I was just telling Adela
How many birds it struck since May.

THE GLOVE

(PETER RONSARD *loquitur*)

"HEIGHO!" yawned one day King Francis,
"Distance all value enhances!
When a man 's busy, why, leisure
Strikes him as wonderful pleasure:

'Faith, and at leisure once is he?
Straightway he wants to be busy.
Here we 've got peace; and aghast I 'm
Caught thinking war the true pastime.
Is there a reason in meter?
Give us your speech, master Peter!"
I who, if mortal dare say so,
Ne'er am at loss with my Naso,
"Sire," I replied, "joys prove cloudlets:
Men are the merest Ixions"—
Here the King whistled aloud, "Let 's
. . . Heigho . . . go look at our lions!"
Such are the sorrowful chances
If you talk fine to King Francis.

And so, to the courtyard proceeding,
Our company, Francis was leading,
Increased by new followers tenfold
Before he arrived at the penfold;
Lords, ladies, like clouds which bedizen
At sunset the western horizon.
And Sir De Lorge pressed 'mid the foremost
With the dame he professed to adore most.
Oh, what a face! One by fits eyed
Her, and the horrible pitside;
For the penfold surrounded a hollow
Which led where the eye scarce dared follow,
And shelved to the chamber secluded
Where Bluebeard, the great lion, brooded.
The King hailed his keeper, an Arab
As glossy and black as a scarab,
And bade him make sport and at once stir
Up and out of his den the old monster.

They opened a hole in the wire-work
Across it, and dropped there a firework,
And fled: one's heart's beating redoubled;
A pause, while the pit's mouth was troubled,
The blackness and silence so utter,
By the firework's slow sparkling and sputter;
Then earth in a sudden contortion
Gave out to our gaze her abortion.
Such a brute! Were I friend Clement Marot
(Whose experience of nature 's but narrow,
And whose faculties move in no small mist
When he versifies David the Psalmist)
I should study that brute to describe you
Illum Juda Leonem de Tribu.
One's whole blood grew curdling and creepy
To see the black mane, vast and heapy,
The tail in the air stiff and straining,
The wide eyes, nor waxing nor waning,
As over the barrier which bounded
His platform, and us who surrounded
The barrier, they reached and they rested
On space that might stand him in best stead:
For who knew, he thought, what the amazement,
The eruption of clatter and blaze meant,
And if, in this minute of wonder,
No outlet, 'mid lightning and thunder,
Lay broad, and, his shackles all shivered,
The lion at last was delivered?
Ay, that was the open sky o'erhead!
And you saw by the flash on his forehead,
By the hope in those eyes wide and steady,
He was leagues in the desert already,
Driving the flocks up the mountain,

Or catlike couched hard by the fountain
To waylay the date-gathering negress:
So guarded he entrance or egress.
"How he stands!" quoth the King: "we may well swear,
(No novice, we 've won our spurs elsewhere
And so can afford the confession,)
We exercise wholesome discretion
In keeping aloof from his threshold,
Once hold you, those jaws want no fresh hold,
Their first would too pleasantly purloin
The visitor's brisket or sirloin:
But who 's he would prove so fool-hardy?
Not the best man of Marignan, pardie!"

The sentence no sooner was uttered,
Than over the rails a glove fluttered,
Fell close to the lion, and rested:
The dame 't was, who flung it and jested
With life so, De Lorge had been wooing
For months past; he sat there pursuing
His suit, weighing out with nonchalance
Fine speeches like gold from a balance.

Sound the trumpet, no true knight 's a tarrier!
De Lorge made one leap at the barrier,
Walked straight to the glove,—while the lion
Ne'er moved, kept his far-reaching eye on
The palm-tree-edged desert-spring's sapphire,
And the musky oiled skin of the Kaffir,—
Picked it up, and as calmly retreated,
Leaped back where the lady was seated,
And full in the face of its owner
Flung the glove.

"Your heart's queen, you dethrone her?
So should I!"—cried the King—"'t was mere vanity,
Not love, set that task to humanity!"
Lords and ladies alike turned with loathing
From such a proved wolf in sheep's clothing.

Not so, I; for I caught an expression
In her brow's undisturbed self-possession
Amid the Court's scoffing and merriment,—
As if from no pleasing experiment
She rose, yet of pain not much heedful
So long as the process was needful,—
As if she had tried in a crucible,
To what "speeches like gold" were reducible,
And, finding the finest prove copper,
Felt the smoke in her face was but proper;
To know what she had *not* to trust to,
Was worth all the ashes and dust too.
She went out 'mid hooting and laughter;
Clement Marot stayed; I followed after,
And asked, as a grace, what it all meant?
If she wished not the rash deed's recallment?
"For I"—so I spoke—"am a poet:
Human nature—behoves that I know it!"

She told me, "Too long had I heard
Of the deed proved alone by the word:
For my love—what De Lorge would not dare!
With my scorn—what De Lorge could compare!
And the endless descriptions of death
He would brave when my lip formed a breath,
I must reckon as braved, or, of course,
Doubt his word—and moreover, perforce,

For such gifts as no lady could spurn,
Must offer my love in return.
When I looked on your lion, it brought
All the dangers at once to my thought,
Encountered by all sorts of men,
Before he was lodged in his den,—
From the poor slave whose club or bare hands
Dug the trap, set the snare on the sands,
With no King and no Court to applaud,
By no shame, should he shrink, overawed,
Yet to capture the creature made shift,
That his rude boys might laugh at the gift,
—To the page who last leaped o'er the fence
Of the pit, on no greater pretence
Than to get back the bonnet he dropped,
Lest his pay for a week should be stopped.
So, wiser I judged it to make
One trial what 'death for my sake'
Really meant, while the power was yet mine,
Than to wait until time should define
Such a phrase not so simply as I,
Who took it to mean just 'to die.'
The blow a glove gives is but weak:
Does the mark yet discolor my cheek?
But when the heart suffers a blow,
Will the pain pass so soon, do you know?"

I looked, as away she was sweeping,
And saw a youth eagerly keeping
As close as he dared to the doorway.
No doubt that a noble should more weigh
His life than befits a plebeian;
And yet, had our brute been Nemean—

(I judge by a certain calm fervor
The youth stepped with, forward to serve her)
—He 'd have scarce thought you did him the worst turn
If you whispered, "Friend, what you 'd get, first earn!"
And when, shortly after, she carried
Her shame from the Court, and they married,
To that marriage some happiness, mauger
The voice of the Court, I dared augur.

MUCKLE-MOUTH MEG

Frowned the Laird on the Lord: "So, red-handed I catch thee?
Death-doomed by our Law of the Border!
We 've a gallows outside and a chiel to dispatch thee:
Who trespasses—hangs: all 's in order."

He met frown with smile, did the young English gallant:
Then the Laird's dame: "Nay, Husband, I beg!
He 's comely: be merciful! Grace for the callant
—If he marries our Muckle-mouth Meg!"

"No mile-wide-mouthed monster of yours do I marry:
Grant rather the gallows!" laughed he.
"Foul fare kith and kin of you—why do you tarry?"
"To tame your fierce temper!" quoth she.

"Shove him quick in the Hole, shut him fast for a week:
Cold, darkness and hunger work wonders:
Who lion-like roars now, mouse-fashion will squeak,
And 'it rains' soon succeed to 'it thunders.' "

A week did he bide in the cold and the dark
—Not hunger: for duly at morning
In flitted a lass, and a voice like a lark
Chirped "Muckle-mouth Meg still ye 're scorning?

"Go hang, but here 's parritch to hearten ye first!"
"Did Meg's muckle-mouth boast within some
Such music as yours, mine should match it or burst:
No frog-jaws! So tell folk, my Winsome!"

Soon week came to end, and, from Hole's door set wide,
Out he marched, and there waited the lassie:
"Yon gallows, or Muckle-mouth Meg for a bride!
Consider! Sky 's blue and turf 's grassy:

"Life 's sweet: shall I say ye wed Muckle-mouth Meg?"
"Not I," quoth the stout heart: "too eerie
The mouth that can swallow a bubblyjock's egg:
Shall I let it munch mine? Never, Dearie!"

"Not Muckle-mouth Meg? Wow, the obstinate man!
Perhaps he would rather wed me!"
"Ay, would he—with just for a dowry your can!"
"I 'm Muckle-mouth Meg," chirruped she.

"Then so—so—so—so—" as he kissed her apace—
"Will I widen thee out till thou turnest
From Margaret Minnikin-mou', by God's grace,
To Muckle-mouth Meg in good earnest!"

MY LAST DUCHESS

FERRARA

THAT 's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will 't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Frà Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 't was not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Frà Pandolf chanced to say "Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat:" such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 't was all one! My favor at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule

She rode with round the terrace—all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men,—good! but thanked
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who 'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
—E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will 't please you rise? We 'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we 'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

I

You 're my friend:
  I was the man the Duke spoke to;
  I helped the Duchess to cast off his yoke, too;
So, here 's the tale from beginning to end,
My friend!

II

Ours is a great wild country:
  If you climb to our castle's top,
  I don't see where your eye can stop;
For when you 've passed the corn-field country,
Where vineyards leave off, flocks are packed,
And sheep-range leads to cattle-tract,
And cattle-tract to open-chase,
And open-chase to the very base
Of the mountain where, at a funeral pace,
Round about, solemn and slow,
One by one, row after row,
Up and up the pine-trees go,
So, like black priests up, and so
Down the other side again
  To another greater, wilder country,
That 's one vast red drear burnt-up plain,
Branched through and through with many a vein
Whence iron 's dug, and copper 's dealt;
  Look right, look left, look straight before,—
Beneath they mine, above they smelt,
  Copper-ore and iron-ore,
And forge and furnace mould and melt,

And so on, moré and ever more,
Till at the last, for a bounding belt,
Comes the salt sand hoar of the great sea-shore,
—And the whole is our Duke's country.

III

I was born the day this present Duke was—
. . . . . .
I in the kennel, he in the bower:
We are of like age to an hour.
My father was huntsman in that day;
Who has not heard my father say
That, when a boar was brought to bay,
Three times, four times out of five,
With his huntspear he 'd contrive
To get the killing-place transfixed,
And pin him true, both eyes betwixt?
And that 's why the old Duke would rather
He lost a salt-pit than my father,
And loved to have him ever in call;
That 's why my father stood in the hall
When the old Duke brought his infant out
To show the people, and while they passed
The wondrous bantling round about,
Was first to start at the outside blast
As the Kaiser's courier blew his horn,
Just a month after the babe was born.
"And," quoth the Kaiser's courier, "since
The Duke has got an heir, our Prince
Needs the Duke's self at his side:"
The Duke looked down and seemed to wince,
But he thought of wars o'er the world wide,
Castles a-fire, men on their march,

The toppling tower, the crashing arch;
And up he looked, and awhile he eyed
The row of crests and shields and banners
Of all achievements after all manners,
And "ay," said the Duke with a surly pride.
The more was his comfort when he died
At next year's end, in a velvet suit,
With a gilt glove on his hand, his foot
In a silken shoe for a leather boot,
Petticoated like a herald,
In a chamber next to an ante-room,
Where he breathed the breath of page and groom,
What he called stink, and they, perfume:
—They should have set him on red Berold
Mad with pride, like fire to manage!
They should have got his cheek fresh tannage
Such a day as to-day in the merry sunshine!

. . . . . .

IV

So, at home, the sick tall yellow Duchess
Was left with the infant in her clutches.

. . . . . .

And now was the time to revisit her tribe.

. . . . . .

And let our people rail and gibe
At the empty hall and extinguished fire,
As loud as we liked, but ever in vain,
Till after long years we had our desire,
And back came the Duke and his mother again.

V

And he came back the pertest little ape
That ever affronted human shape;

Full of his travel, struck at himself.
You 'd say, he despised our bluff old ways?
—Not he! For in Paris they told the elf
Our rough North land was the Land of Lays,
The one good thing left in evil days;
Since the Mid-Ages was the Heroic Time,
And only in wild nooks like ours
Could you taste of it yet as in its prime,
And see true castles with proper towers,
Young-hearted women, old-minded men,
And manners now as manners were then.
So, all that the old Dukes had been, without knowing it,
This Duke would fain know he was, without being it;
'T was not for the joy's self, but the joy of his showing it,
Nor for the pride's self, but the pride of our seeing it,
He revived all usages thoroughly worn-out,
The souls of them fumed-forth, the hearts of them torn-out:
And chief in the chase his neck he perilled
On a lathy horse, all legs and length,
With blood for bone, all speed, no strength;
—They should have set him on red Berold
With the red eye slow consuming in fire,
And the thin stiff ear like an abbey-spire!

VI

Well, such as he was, he must marry, we heard:
And out of a convent, at the word,
Came the lady, in time of spring.
—Oh, old thoughts they cling, they cling!
That day, I know, with a dozen oaths
I clad myself in thick hunting-clothes
Fit for the chase of urochs or buffle
In winter-time when you need to muffle.

But the Duke had a mind we should cut a figure,
And so we saw the lady arrive:
My friend, I have seen a white crane bigger!
She was the smallest lady alive,
Made in a piece of nature's madness,
Too small, almost, for the life and gladness
That over-filled her, as some hive
Out of the bears' reach on the high trees
Is crowded with its safe merry bees:
In truth, she was not hard to please!
Up she looked, down she looked, round at the mead,
Straight at the castle, that 's best indeed
To look at from outside the walls:
As for us, styled the "serfs and thralls,"
She as much thanked me as if she had said it,
(With her eyes, do you understand?)
Because I patted her horse while I led it;
And Max, who rode on her other hand,
Said, no bird flew past but she inquired
What its true name was, nor ever seemed tired—
If that was an eagle she saw hover,
And the green and gray bird on the field was the plover.
When suddenly appeared the Duke:
And as down she sprung, the small foot pointed
On to my hand,—as with a rebuke,
And as if his backbone were not jointed,
The Duke stepped rather aside than forward,
And welcomed her with his grandest smile;
And, mind you, his mother all the while
Chilled in the rear, like a wind to Nor'ward;
And up, like a weary yawn, with its pullies
Went, in a shriek, the rusty portcullis;
And, like a glad sky the north-wind sullies,

The lady's face stopped its play,
As if her first hair had grown gray;
For such things must begin some one day.

VII

In a day or two she was well again;
As who should say, "You labor in vain!
This is all a jest against God, who meant
I should ever be, as I am, content
And glad in his sight; therefore, glad I will be."
So, smiling as at first went she.

VIII

She was active, stirring, all fire—
Could not rest, could not tire—
To a stone she might have given life!
(I myself loved once, in my day)
—For a shepherd's, miner's, huntsman's wife,
(I had a wife, I know what I say)
Never in all the world such an one!
And here was plenty to be done,
And she that could do it, great or small,
She was to do nothing at all.
There was already this man in his post,
This in his station, and that in his office,
And the Duke's plan admitted a wife, at most,
To meet his eye, with the other trophies,
Now outside the hall, now in it,
To sit thus, stand thus, see and be seen,
At the proper place in the proper minute,
And die away the life between.
And it was amusing enough, each infraction
Of rule—(but for after-sadness that came)

To hear the consummate self-satisfaction
With which the young Duke and the old dame
Would let her advise, and criticise,
And, being a fool, instruct the wise,
And, child-like, parcel out praise or blame:
They bore it all in complacent guise,
As though an artificer, after contriving
A wheel-work image as if it were living,
Should find with delight it could motion to strike him!
So found the Duke, and his mother like him:
The lady hardly got a rebuff—
That had not been contemptuous enough,
With his cursed smirk, as he nodded applause,
And kept off the old mother-cat's claws.

IX

So, the little lady grew silent and thin,
Paling and ever paling,
As the way is with a hid chagrin;
And the Duke perceived that she was ailing,
And said in his heart, "'T is done to spite me,
But I shall find in my power to right me!"
. . . . . .

X

Well, early in autumn, at first winter-warning,
When the stag had to break with his foot, of a morning,
A drinking-hole out of the fresh tender ice
That covered the pond till the sun, in a trice,
Loosening it, let out a ripple of gold,
And another and another, and faster and faster,
Till, dimpling to blindness, the wide water rolled:
Then it so chanced that the Duke our master

Asked himself what were the pleasures in season,
And found, since the calendar bade him be hearty,
He should do the Middle Age no treason
In resolving on a hunting-party.
Always provided, old books showed the way of it!
What meant old poets by their strictures?
And when old poets had said their say of it,
How taught old painters in their pictures?
We must revert to the proper channels,
Workings in tapestry, paintings on panels,
And gather up woodcraft's authentic traditions:
Here was food for our various ambitions.

. . . . . .

So that the deer now, to make a short rhyme on 't,
What with our Venerers, Prickers and Verderers,
Might hope for real hunters at length and not murderers,
And oh the Duke's tailor, he had a hot time on 't!

XI

Now you must know that when the first dizziness
Of flap-hats and buff-coats and jack-boots subsided,
The Duke put this question, "The Duke's part provided,
Had not the Duchess some share in the business?"

. . . . . .

And, after much laying of heads together,
Somebody's cap got a notable feather
By the announcement with proper unction
That he had discovered the lady's function;
Since ancient authors gave this tenet,
"When horns wind a mort and the deer is at siege,
Let the dame of the castle prick forth on her jennet,
And with water to wash the hands of her liege

In a clean ewer with a fair toweling,
Let her preside at the disemboweling."

. . . . . .

Yet when the Duke to his lady signified,
Just a day before, as he judged most dignified,
In what a pleasure she was to participate,—
  And, instead of leaping wide in flashes,
  Her eyes just lifted their long lashes,
As if pressed by fatigue even he could not dissipate,
And duly acknowledged the Duke's forethought,
But spoke of her health, if her health were worth aught,
Of the weight by day and the watch by night,
And much wrong now that used to be right,
So, thanking him, declined the hunting,—
Was conduct ever more affronting?
With all the ceremony settled—
  With the towel ready, and the sewer
  Polishing up his oldest ewer,
  And the jennet pitched upon, a piebald,
  Black-barred, cream-coated and pink eye-balled,—
No wonder if the Duke was nettled!
And when she persisted nevertheless,—
Well, I suppose here 's the time to confess
That there ran half round our lady's chamber
A balcony none of the hardest to clamber;
And that Jacynth the tire-woman, ready in waiting,
Stayed in call outside, what need of relating?
And since Jacynth was like a June rose, why, a fervent
Adorer of Jacynth of course was your servant;
And if she had the habit to peep through the casement,
  How could I keep at any vast distance?
  And so, as I say, on the lady's persistence,
The Duke, dumb stricken with amazement,

Stood for a while in a sultry smother,
And then, with a smile that partook of the awful,
Turned her over to his yellow mother
To learn what was held decorous and lawful;
And the mother smelt blood with a cat-like instinct,
As her cheek quick whitened thro' all its quince-tinct.
Oh, but the lady heard the whole truth at once!
What meant she?—Who was she?—Her duty and station,
The wisdom of age and the folly of youth, at once,
Its decent regard and its fitting relation.

. . . . . .

Well, somehow or other it ended at last,
And, licking her whiskers, out she passed;
And after her,—making (he hoped) a face
Like Emperor Nero or Sultan Saladin,
Stalked the Duke's self with the austere grace
Of ancient hero or modern paladin,
From door to staircase—oh, such a solemn
Unbending of the vertebral column!

XII

However, at sunrise our company mustered;
And here was the huntsman bidding unkennel,
And there 'neath his bonnet the pricker blustered,
With feather dank as a bough of wet fennel;
For the court-yard walls were filled with fog
You might have cut as an ax chops a log—
Like so much wool for color and bulkiness;
And out rode the Duke in a perfect sulkiness,
Since, before breakfast, a man feels but queasily.

. . . . . .

And lo, as he looked around uneasily,
The sun ploughed the fog up and drove it asunder

This way and that from the valley under;
  And, looking through the court-yard arch,
Down in the valley, what should meet him
  But a troop of Gipsies on their march?
No doubt with the annual gifts to greet him.

XIII

. . . . . .

And up they wound till they reached the ditch,
Whereat all stopped save one, a witch
That I knew, as she hobbled from the group,
  By her gait directly and her stoop,
I, whom Jacynth was used to importune
To let that same witch tell us our fortune.
The oldest Gipsy then above ground;
And, sure as the autumn season came round,
She paid us a visit for profit or pastime,
And every time, as she swore, for the last time.
And presently she was seen to sidle
Up to the Duke till she touched his bridle,
So that the horse of a sudden reared up
As under its nose the old witch peered up
With her worn-out eyes, or rather eye-holes
  Of no use now but to gather brine,
  And began a kind of level whine
Such as they used to sing to their viols
When their ditties they go grinding
Up and down with nobody minding:
And then, as of old, at the end of the humming
Her usual presents were forthcoming
—A dog-whistle blowing the fiercest of trebles,
(Just a sea-shore stone holding a dozen fine pebbles,)
Or a porcelain mouth-piece to screw on a pipe-end,—

And so she awaited her annual stipend.
But this time, the Duke would scarcely vouchsafe
A word in reply; and in vain she felt
With twitching fingers at her belt
For the purse of sleek pine-martin pelt,
Ready to put what he gave in her pouch safe,—
Till, either to quicken his apprehension,
Or possibly with an after-intention,
She was come, she said, to pay her duty
To the new Duchess, the youthful beauty.
No sooner had she named his lady,
Than a shine lit up the face so shady,
And its smirk returned with a novel meaning—
For it struck him, the babe just wanted weaning;
If one gave her a taste of what life was and sorrow,
She, foolish to-day, would be wiser to-morrow;
And who so fit a teacher of trouble
As this sordid crone bent well-nigh double?
So, glancing at her wolf-skin vesture,
. . . . . .
He was contrasting, 't was plain from his gesture,
The life of the lady so flower-like and delicate
With the loathsome squalor of this helicat.
I, in brief, was the man the Duke beckoned
From out of the throng, and while I drew near
He told the crone—as I since have reckoned
By the way he bent and spoke into her ear
With circumspection and mystery—
The main of the lady's history,
Her frowardness and ingratitude:
And for all the crone's submissive attitude
I could see round her mouth the loose plaits tightening,
And her brow with assenting intelligence brightening,

As though she engaged with hearty goodwill
Whatever he now might enjoin to fulfil,
And promised the lady a thorough frightening.
And so, just giving her a glimpse
Of a purse, with the air of a man who imps
The wing of the hawk that shall fetch the hernshaw,
He bade me take the Gipsy mother
And set her telling some story or other
Of hill or dale, oak-wood or fernshaw,
To wile away a weary hour
For the lady left alone in her bower,
Whose mind and body craved exertion
And yet shrank from all better diversion.

XIV

Then clapping heel to his horse, the mere curveter,
Out rode the Duke, and after his hollo
Horses and hounds swept, huntsman and servitor,
And back I turned and bade the crone follow.
And what makes me confident what 's to be told you
Had all along been of this crone's devising,
Is, that, on looking round sharply, behold you,
There was a novelty quick as surprising:
For first, she had shot up a full head in stature,
And her step kept pace with mine nor faltered,
As if age had foregone its usurpature,
And the ignoble mien was wholly altered,
And the face looked quite of another nature,
And the change reached too, whatever the change meant,
Her shaggy wolf-skin cloak's arrangement:
For where its tatters hung loose like sedges,
Gold coins were glittering on the edges;
And under her brow, like a snail's horns newly

Come out as after the rain he paces,
Two unmistakable eye-points duly
Live and aware looked out of their places.
So, we went and found Jacynth at the entry
Of the lady's chamber standing sentry;
I told the command and produced my companion,
And Jacynth rejoiced to admit any one,
For since last night, by the same token,
Not a single word had the lady spoken:
They went in both to the presence together,
While I in the balcony watched the weather.

XV

And now, what took place at the very first of all,
I cannot tell, as I never could learn it:
Jacynth constantly wished a curse to fall
On that little head of hers and burn it
If she knew how she came to drop so soundly
Asleep of a sudden, and there continue
The whole time sleeping as profoundly
As one of the boars my father would pin you
'Twixt the eyes where life holds garrison,
—Jacynth, forgive me the comparison!
But where I begin my own narration
Is a little after I took my station
To breathe the fresh air from the balcony,
And, having in those days a falcon eye,
To follow the hunt thro' the open country,
From where the bushes thinlier crested
The hillocks, to a plain where 's not one tree.
When, in a moment, my ear was arrested
By—was it singing, or was it saying,
Or a strange musical instrument playing

In the chamber?—and to be certain
I pushed the lattice, pulled the curtain,
And there lay Jacynth asleep,
Yet as if a watch she tried to keep,
In a rosy sleep along the floor
With her head against the door;
While in the midst, on the seat of state,
Was a queen—the Gipsy woman late,
With head and face downbent
On the lady's head and face intent:
For, coiled at her feet like a child at ease,
The lady sat between her knees,
And o'er them the lady's clasped hands met,
And on those hands her chin was set,
And her upturned face met the face of the crone
Wherein the eyes had grown and grown
As if she could double and quadruple
At pleasure the play of either pupil.

. . . . . .

I said, "Is it blessing, is it banning?"

. . . . . .

But, just as I thought to spring in to the rescue,
At once I was stopped by the lady's expression:
For it was life her eyes were drinking
From the crone's wide pair above unwinking,
—Life's pure fire, received without shrinking,
Into the heart and breast whose heaving
Told you no single drop they were leaving,
—Life, that filling her, passed redundant
Into her very hair, back swerving
Over each shoulder, loose and abundant,
As her head thrown back showed the white throat curving;
And the very tresses shared in the pleasure,

Moving to the mystic measure,
Bounding as the bosom bounded.
I stopped short, more and more confounded,
As still her cheeks burned and eyes glistened,
As she listened and she listened:
When all at once a hand detained me,
The selfsame contagion gained me,
And I kept time to the wondrous chime,
Making out words and prose and rhyme,
Till it seemed that the music furled
Its wings like a task fulfilled, and dropped
From under the words it first had propped,
And left them midway in the world:
Word took word as hand takes hand,
I could hear at last, and understand,
And when I held the unbroken thread,
The Gipsy said:—

"And so at last we find my tribe,
And so I set thee in the midst,
And to one and all of them describe
What thou saidst and what thou didst,
Our long and terrible journey through,
And all thou art ready to say and do
In the trials that remain:
I trace them the vein and the other vein
That meet on thy brow and part again,
Making our rapid mystic mark;
And I bid my people prove and probe
Each eye's profound and glorious globe
Till they detect the kindred spark
In those depths so dear and dark;
. . . . . .

For so I prove thee, to one and all,
  Fit, when my people ope their breast,
To see the sign, and hear the call,
  And take the vow, and stand the test
  Which adds one more child to the rest—
When the breast is bare and the arms are wide,
And the world is left outside.
For there is probation to decree,
And many and long must the trials be
Thou shalt victoriously endure,
If that brow is true and those eyes are sure.

. . . . . .

So, trial after trial past,
Wilt thou fall at the very last
Breathless, half in trance
With the thrill of the great deliverance,
Into our arms for evermore;
And thou shalt know, those arms once curled
  About thee, what we knew before,
How love is the only good in the world.
Henceforth be loved as heart can love,
Or brain devise, or hand approve!
Stand up, look below,
It is our life at thy feet we throw
To step with into light and joy;
Not a power of life but we employ
To satisfy thy nature's want.

. . . . . .

I foresee and could foretell
Thy future portion, sure and well:
But those passionate eyes speak true, speak true,
Let them say what thou shalt do!
Only be sure thy daily life,

In its peace or in its strife,
Never shall be unobserved;
We pursue thy whole career,
And hope for it, or doubt, or fear,—
Lo, hast thou kept thy path or swerved,
We are beside thee in all thy ways,
With our blame, with our praise,
Our shame to feel, our pride to show,
Glad, angry—but indifferent, no!
. . . . . .
So, at the last shall come old age,
Decrepit as befits that stage;
How else wouldst thou retire apart
With the hoarded memories of thy heart,
And gather all to the very least
Of the fragments of life's earlier feast,
Let fall through eagerness to find
The crowning dainties yet behind?
Ponder on the entire past
Laid together thus at last,
When the twilight helps to fuse
The first fresh with the faded hues,
And the outline of the whole,
As round eve's shades their framework roll,
Grandly fronts for once thy soul.
And then as, 'mid the dark, a gleam
Of yet another morning breaks,
And like the hand which ends a dream,
Death, with the might of his sunbeam,
Touches the flesh and the soul awakes,
Then—"

Ay, then indeed something would happen!
But what? For here her voice changed like a bird's;

There grew more of the music and less of the words;
Had Jacynth only been by me to clap pen
To paper and put you down every syllable
With those clever clerkly fingers,
All I 've forgotten as well as what lingers
In this old brain of mine that 's but ill able
To give you even this poor version—
. . . . . .
Just, do you mark, when the song was sweetest,
The peace most deep and the charm completest,
There came, shall I say, a snap—
And the charm vanished!
And my sense returned, so strangely banished,
And, starting as from a nap,
I knew the crone was bewitching my lady,
With Jacynth asleep; and but one spring made I
Down from the casement, round to the portal,—
Another minute and I had entered,—
When the door opened, and more than mortal
Stood, with a face where to my mind centered
All beauties I ever saw or shall see,
The Duchess: I stopped as if struck by palsy.
She was so different, happy and beautiful,
I felt at once that all was best,
And that I had nothing to do, for the rest,
But wait her commands, obey and be dutiful.
Not that, in fact, there was any commanding;
I saw the glory of her eye,
And the brow's height and the breast's expanding,
And I was hers to live or to die.
As for finding what she wanted,
You know God Almighty granted
Such little signs should serve wild creatures

To tell one another all their desires,
So that each knows what his friend requires,
And does its bidding without teachers.
I preceded her; the crone
Followed silent and alone;
I spoke to her, but she merely jabbered
In the old style; both her eyes had slunk
Back to their pits; her stature shrunk;
In short, the soul in its body sunk
Like a blade sent home to its scabbard.
We descended, I preceding;
Crossed the court with nobody heeding;
All the world was at the chase,
The court-yard like a desert-place,
The stable emptied of its small fry;
I saddled myself the very palfrey
I remember patting while it carried her,
The day she arrived and the Duke married her.
And, do you know, though it 's easy deceiving
Oneself in such matters, I can't help believing
The lady had not forgotten it either,
And knew the poor devil so much beneath her
Would have been only too glad, for her service,
To dance on hot ploughshares like a Turk dervise,
But, unable to pay proper duty where owing it,
Was reduced to that pitiful method of showing it:
For though the moment I began setting
His saddle on my own nag of Berold's begetting,
(Not that I meant to be obtrusive)
She stopped me, while his rug was shifting,
By a single rapid finger's lifting,
And, with a gesture kind but conclusive,
And a little shake of the head, refused me,—

I say, although she never used me,
Yet when she was mounted, the Gipsy behind her,
And I ventured to remind her,
I suppose with a voice of less steadiness
Than usual, for my feeling exceeded me,
—Something to the effect that I was in readiness
Whenever God should please she needed me,—
Then, do you know, her face looked down on me
With a look that placed a crown on me,
And she felt in her bosom,—mark, her bosom—
And, as a flower-tree drops its blossom,
Dropped me . . . ah, had it been a purse
Of silver, my friend, or gold that 's worse,
Why, you see, as soon as I found myself
So understood,—that a true heart so may gain
Such a reward,—I should have gone home again,
Kissed Jacynth, and soberly drowned myself!
It was a little plait of hair
Such as friends in a convent make
To wear, each for the other's sake,—
This, see, which at my breast I wear,
Ever did (rather to Jacynth's grudgment),
And ever shall, till the Day of Judgment.
And then,—and then,—to cut short,—this is idle,
These are feelings it is not good to foster,—
I pushed the gate wide, she shook the bridle,
And the palfrey bounded,—and so we lost her.

XVI

When the liquor 's out why clink the cannikin?
I did think to describe you the panic in
The redoubtable breast of our master the mannikin,
And what was the pitch of his mother's yellowness,

When she heard, what she called the flight of the feloness
—But it seems such child's play,
What they said and did with the lady away!
. . . . . .
Nay, to my mind, the world's face looked so stern
As that sweet form disappeared through the postern,
She that kept it in constant good humor,
It ought to have stopped; there seemed nothing to do more.
But the world thought otherwise and went on,
And my head 's one that its spite was spent on:
Thirty years are fled since that morning,
And with them all my head's adorning.
Nor did the old Duchess die outright,
As you expect, of suppressed spite:
. . . . . .
But she and her son agreed, I take it,
That no one should touch on the story to wake it,
For the wound in the Duke's pride rankled fiery,
So, they made no search and small inquiry—
And when fresh Gipsies have paid us a visit, I 've
Noticed the couple were never inquisitive,
But told them they 're folks the Duke don't want here,
And bade them make haste and cross the frontier.
Brief, the Duchess was gone and the Duke was glad of it,
And the old one was in the young one's stead,
And took, in her place, the household's head,
And a blessed time the household had of it!
. . . . . .

XVII

You 're my friend—
What a thing friendship is, world without end!

I have seen my little lady once more,
Jacynth, the Gipsy, Berold, and the rest of it,
For to me spoke the Duke, as I told you before;
I always wanted to make a clean breast of it:
. . . . . .
I 'll tell you what I intend to do:
I must see this fellow his sad life through—
He is our Duke, after all,
And I, as he says, but a serf and thrall.
My father was born here, and I inherit
His fame, a chain he bound his son with;
Could I pay in a lump I should prefer it,
But there 's no mine to blow up and get done with:
So, I must stay till the end of the chapter.
For, as to our middle-age-manners-adapter,
Be it a thing to be glad on or sorry on,
Some day or other, his head in a morion
And breast in a hauberk, his heels he 'll kick up,
Slain by an onslaught fierce of hiccup.
And then, when red doth the sword of our Duke rust,
And its leathern sheath lie o'ergrown with a blue crust,
Then I shall scrape together my earnings;
For, you see, in the churchyard Jacynth reposes,
And our children all went the way of the roses:
It 's a long lane that knows no turnings.
One needs but little tackle to travel in;
So, just one stout cloak shall I indue:
And for a staff, what beats the javelin
With which his boars my father pinned you?
And then, for a purpose you shall hear presently,
Taking some Cotnar, a tight plump skinful,
I shall go journeying, who but I, pleasantly!
Sorrow is vain and despondency sinful.

What 's a man's age? He must hurry more, that 's all;
Cram in a day, what his youth took a year to hold:
When we mind labor, then only, we 're too old—

. . . . . .

And at last, as its haven some buffeted ship sees,

. . . . . .

I hope to get safely out of the turmoil
And arrive one day at the land of the Gipsies,
And find my lady, or hear the last news of her
From some old thief and son of Lucifer,
His forehead chapleted green with wreathy hop,
Sunburned all over like an Æthiop.
And when my Cotnar begins to operate
And the tongue of the rogue to run at a proper rate,
And our wine-skin, tight once, shows each flaccid dent,
I shall drop in with—as if by accident—
"You never knew then, how it all ended,
What fortune good or bad attended
The little lady your Queen befriended?"
—And when that 's told me, what 's remaining?
This world 's too hard for my explaining.
The same wise judge of matters equine
Who still preferred some slim four-year-old
To the big-boned stock of mighty Berold,
And, for strong Cotnar, drank French weak wine,
He also must be such a lady's scorner!
Smooth Jacob still robs homely Esau:
Now up, now down, the world's one see-saw.
—So, I shall find out some snug corner
Under a hedge, like Orson the wood-knight,
Turn myself round and bid the world good night;

And sleep a sound sleep till the trumpet's blowing
  Wakes me (unless priests cheat us laymen)
To a world where will be no further throwing
  Pearls before swine that can't value them. Amen!

THE GUARDIAN-ANGEL

A PICTURE AT FANO

I

Dear and great Angel, wouldst thou only leave
  That child, when thou has done with him, for me!
Let me sit all the day here, that when eve
  Shall find performed thy special ministry,
And time come for departure, thou, suspending
Thy flight, mayst see another child for tending,
  Another still to quiet and retrieve.

II

Then I shall feel thee step one step, no more,
  From where thou standest now, to where I gaze.
—And suddenly my head is covered o'er
  With those wings, white above the child who prays
Now on that tomb—and I shall feel thee guarding
Me, out of all the world; for me, discarding
  Yon heaven thy home, that waits and opes its door.

III

I would not look up thither past thy head
  Because the door opes, like that child, I know,
For I should have thy gracious face instead,
  Thou bird of God! And wilt thou bend me low

Like him, and lay, like his, my hands together,
And lift them up to pray, and gently tether
Me, as thy lamb there, with thy garment's spread?

IV

If this was ever granted, I would rest
My head beneath thine, while thy healing hands
Close-covered both my eyes beside thy breast,
Pressing the brain, which too much thought expands,
Back to its proper size again, and smoothing
Distortion down till every nerve had soothing,
And all lay quiet, happy and suppressed.

V

How soon all worldly wrong would be repaired!
I think how I should view the earth and skies
And sea, when once again my brow was bared
After thy healing, with such different eyes.
O world, as God has made it! All is beauty:
And knowing this, is love, and love is duty.
What further may be sought for or declared?

AT THE "MERMAID"

The figure that thou here seest . . . Tut!
Was it for gentle Shakespeare put?
B. Jonson. (*Adapted.*)

I

I—"next Poet?" No, my hearties,
I nor am nor fain would be!
Choose your chiefs and pick your parties,
Not one soul revolt to me!

I, forsooth, sow song-sedition?
I, a schism in verse provoke?
I, blown up by bard's ambition,
Burst—your bubble-king? You joke.

II

Come, be grave! The sherris mantling
Still about each mouth, mayhap,
Breeds you insight—just a scantling—
Brings me truth out—just a scrap.
Look and tell me! Written, spoken,
Here 's my life-long work: and where
—Where 's your warrant or my token
I 'm the dead king's son and heir?

III

Here 's my work: does work discover—
What was rest from work—my life?
Did I live man's hater, lover?
Leave the world at peace, at strife?
Call earth ugliness or beauty?
See things there in large or small?
Use to pay its Lord my duty?
Use to own a lord at all?

IV

Blank of such a record, truly
Here 's the work I hand, this scroll,
Yours to take or leave; as duly,
Mine remains the unproffered soul.
So much, no whit more, my debtors—
How should one like me lay claim
To that largess elders, betters
Sell you cheap their souls for—fame?

V

Which of you did I enable
Once to slip inside my breast,
There to catalogue and label
What I like least, what love best,
Hope and fear, believe and doubt of,
Seek and shun, respect—deride?
Who has right to make a rout of
Rarities he found inside?

VI

Rarities or, as he 'd rather,
Rubbish such as stocks his own:
Need and greed (O strange) the Father
Fashioned not for him alone!
Whence—the comfort set a-strutting,
Whence—the outcry "Haste, behold!
Bard's breast open wide, past shutting,
Shows what brass we took for gold!"

VII

Friends, I doubt not he 'd display you
Brass—myself call orichalc,—
Furnish much amusement; pray you
Therefore, be content I balk
Him and you, and bar my portal!
Here 's my work outside: opine
What 's inside me mean and mortal!
Take your pleasure, leave me mine!

VIII

Which is—not to buy your laurel
As last king did, nothing loth.
Tale adorned and pointed moral
Gained him praise and pity both.

Out rushed sighs and groans by dozens,
  Forth by scores oaths, curses flew:
Proving you were cater-cousins,
  Kith and kindred, king and you!

IX

Whereas do I ne'er so little
  (Thanks to sherris) leave ajar
Bosom's gate—no jot nor tittle
  Grow we nearer than we are.
Sinning, sorrowing, despairing,
  Body-ruined, spirit-wrecked,—
Should I give my woes an airing,—
  Where 's one plague that claims respect?

X

Have you found your life distasteful?
  My life did, and does, smack sweet.
Was your youth of pleasure wasteful?
  Mine I saved and hold complete.
Do your joys with age diminish?
  When mine fail me, I 'll complain.
Must in death your daylight finish?
  My sun sets to rise again.

XI

What, like you, he proved—your Pilgrim—
  This our world a wilderness,
Earth still gray and heaven still grim,
  Not a hand there his might press,
Not a heart his own might throb to,
  Men all rogues and women—say,
Dolls which boys' heads duck and bob to,
  Grown folk drop or throw away?

XII

My experience being other,
How should I contribute verse
Worthy of your king and brother?
Balaam-like I bless, not curse.
I find earth not gray but rosy,
Heaven not grim but fair of hue.
Do I stoop? I pluck a posy.
Do I stand and stare? All 's blue.

XIII

Doubtless I am pushed and shoved by
Rogues and fools enough: the more
Good luck mine, I love, am loved by
Some few honest to the core.
Scan the near high, scout the far low!
"But the low come close:" what then?
Simpletons? My match is Marlowe;
Sciolists? My mate is Ben.

XIV

Womankind—"the cat-like nature,
False and fickle, vain and weak"—
What of this sad nomenclature
Suits my tongue, if I must speak?
Does the sex invite, repulse so,
Tempt, betray, by fits and starts?
So becalm but to convulse so,
Decking heads and breaking hearts?

XV

Therefore, since no leg to stand on
Thus I 'm left with,—joy or grief
Be the issue,—I abandon
Hope or care you name me Chief!

Chief and king and Lord's anointed,
I?—who never once have wished
Death before the day appointed:
Lived and liked, not poohed and pished!

XVI

Back then to our sherris-brewage!
"Kingship" quotha? I shall wait—
Waive the present time: some new age . . .
But let fools anticipate!
Meanwhile greet me—"friend, good fellow,
Gentle Will," my merry men!
As for making Envy yellow
With "Next Poet"—(Manners, Ben!)

THE BOY AND THE ANGEL

Morning, evening, noon and night,
"Praise God!" sang Theocrite.

Then to his poor trade he turned,
Whereby the daily meal was earned.

Hard he labored, long and well;
O'er his work the boy's curls fell.

But ever, at each period,
He stopped and sang, "Praise God!"

Then back again his curls he threw,
And cheerful turned to work anew.

Said Blaise, the listening monk, "Well done;
I doubt not thou art heard, my son:

"As well as if thy voice to-day
Were praising God, the Pope's great way.

"This Easter Day, the Pope at Rome
Praises God from Peter's dome."

Said Theocrite, "Would God that I
Might praise Him, that great way, and die!"

Night passed, day shone,
And Theocrite was gone.

With God a day endures alway,
A thousand years are but a day.

God said in heaven, "Nor day nor night
Now brings the voice of my delight."

Then Gabriel, like a rainbow's birth,
Spread his wings and sank to earth;

Entered, in flesh, the empty cell,
Lived there, and played the craftsman well;

And morning, evening, noon and night,
Praised God in place of Theocrite.

And from a boy, to youth he grew:
The man put off the stripling's hue:

The man matured and fell away
Into the season of decay:

And ever o'er the trade he bent,
And ever lived on earth content.

(He did God's will; to him, all one
If on the earth or in the sun.)

God said, "A praise is in mine ear;
There is no doubt in it, no fear:

"So sing old worlds, and so
New worlds that from my footstool go.

"Clearer loves sound other ways:
I miss my little human praise."

Then forth sprang Gabriel's wings, off fell
The flesh disguise, remained the cell.

'T was Easter Day: he flew to Rome,
And paused above Saint Peter's dome.

In the tiring-room close by
The great outer gallery,

With his holy vestments dight,
Stood the new Pope, Theocrite:

And all his past career
Came back upon him clear,

Since when, a boy, he plied his trade,
Till on his life the sickness weighed;

And in his cell, when death drew near,
An angel in a dream brought cheer:

And rising from the sickness drear,
He grew a priest, and now stood here.

To the East with praise he turned,
And on his sight the angel burned.

"I bore thee from thy craftsman's cell,
And set thee here; I did not well.

"Vainly I left my angel-sphere,
Vain was thy dream of many a year.

"Thy voice's praise seemed weak; it dropped—
Creation's chorus stopped!

"Go back and praise again
The early way, while I remain.

"With that weak voice of our disdain,
Take up creation's pausing strain.

"Back to the cell and poor employ:
Resume the craftsman and the boy!"

Theocrite grew old at home;
A new Pope dwelt in Peter's dome.

One vanished as the other died:
They sought God side by side.

AMPHIBIAN

I

THE fancy I had to-day,
Fancy which turned a fear!
I swam far out in the bay,
Since waves laughed warm and clear.

II

I lay and looked at the sun,
The noon-sun looked at me:
Between us two, no one
Live creature, that I could see.

III

Yes! There came floating by
Me, who lay floating too,
Such a strange butterfly!
Creature as dear as new:

IV

Because the membraned wings
So wonderful, so wide,
So sun-suffused, were things
Like soul and naught beside.

V

A handbreadth over head!
All of the sea my own,
It owned the sky instead;
Both of us were alone.

VI

I never shall join its flight,
For, naught buoys flesh in air.
If it touch the sea—good night!
Death sure and swift waits there.

VII

Can the insect feel the better
For watching the uncouth play
Of limbs that slip the fetter,
Pretend as they were not clay?

VIII

Undoubtedly I rejoice
That the air comports so well
With a creature which had the choice
Of the land once. Who can tell?

IX

What if a certain soul
Which early slipped its sheath,
And has for its home the whole
Of heaven, thus look beneath,

X

Thus watch one who, in the world,
Both lives and likes life's way,
Nor wishes the wings unfurled
That sleep in the worm, they say?

XI

But sometimes when the weather
Is blue, and warm waves tempt
To free oneself of tether,
And try a life exempt

XII

From wordly noise and dust,
  In the sphere which overbrims
With passion and thought,—why, just
  Unable to fly, one swims!

XIII

By passion and thought upborne,
  One smiles to oneself—"They fare
Scarce better, they need not scorn
  Our sea, who live in the air!"

XIV

Emancipate thro' passion
  And thought, with sea for sky,
We substitute, in a fashion,
  For heaven—poetry:

XV

Which sea, to all intent,
  Gives flesh such noon-disport
As a finer element
  Affords the spirit-sort.

XVI

Whatever they are, we seem:
  Imagine the thing they know;
All deeds they do, we dream;
  Can heaven be else but so?

XVII

And meantime, yonder streak
  Meets the horizon's verge;
That is the land, to seek
  If we tire or dread the surge:

XVIII

Land the solid and safe—
To welcome again (confess!)
When, high and dry, we chafe
The body, and don the dress.

XIX

Does she look, pity, wonder
At one who mimics flight,
Swims—heaven above, sea under,
Yet always earth in sight?

AMONG THE ROCKS

I

Oh, good gigantic smile o' the brown old earth,
This autumn morning! How he sets his bones
To bask i' the sun, and thrusts out knees and feet
For the ripple to run over in its mirth;
Listening the while, where on the heap of stones
The white breast of the sea-lark twitters sweet.

II

That is the doctrine, simple, ancient, true;
Such is life's trial, as old earth smiles and knows.
If you loved only what were worth your love,
Love were clear gain, and wholly well for you:
Make the low nature better by your throes!
Give earth yourself, go up for gain above!

SONG FROM "PIPPA PASSES"

THE year 's at the spring,
And day 's at the morn;
Morning 's at seven;
The hill-side 's dew-pearled;
The lark 's on the wing;
The snail 's on the thorn;
God 's in His heaven—
All 's right with the world!

RABBI BEN EZRA

I

GROW old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in His hand
Who saith "A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!"

II

Not that, amassing flowers,
Youth sighed "Which rose make ours,
Which lily leave and then as best recall!"
Not that, admiring stars,
It yearned "Nor Jove, nor Mars;
Mine be some figured flame which blends, transcends them all!"

III

Not for such hopes and fears
Annulling youth's brief years,
Do I remonstrate: folly wide the mark!
Rather I prize the doubt
Low kinds exist without,
Finished and finite clods, untroubled by a spark.

IV

Poor vaunt of life indeed,
Were man but formed to feed
On joy, to solely seek and find and feast:
Such feasting ended, then
As sure an end to men;
Irks care the crop-full bird? Frets doubt the maw-crammed beast?

V

Rejoice we are allied
To That which doth provide
And not partake, effect and not receive!
A spark disturbs our clod;
Nearer we hold of God
Who gives, than of His tribes that take, I must believe.

VI

Then, welcome each rebuff
That turns earth's smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
Be our joys three-parts pain!
Strive, and hold cheap the strain;
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!

VII

For thence,—a paradox
Which comforts while it mocks,—
Shall life succeed in that it seems to fail:
What I aspired to be,
And was not, comforts me:
A brute I might have been, but would not sink i' the scale.

VIII

What is he but a brute
Whose flesh has soul to suit,
Whose spirit works lest arms and legs want play?
To man, propose this test—
Thy body at its best,
How far can that project thy soul on its lone way?

IX

Yet gifts should prove their use:
I own the Past profuse
Of power each side, perfection every turn:
Eyes, ears took in their dole,
Brain treasured up the whole;
Should not the heart beat once "How good to live and learn?"

X

Not once beat "Praise be Thine!
I see the whole design,
I, who saw power, see now love perfect too:
Perfect I call Thy plan:
Thanks that I was a man!
Maker, remake, complete,—I trust what Thou shalt do!"

XI

For pleasant is this flesh;
Our soul, in its rose-mesh
Pulled ever to the earth, still yearns for rest;
Would we some prize might hold
To match those manifold
Possessions of the brute,—gain most, as we did best!

XII

Let us not always say
"Spite of this flesh to-day
I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole!"
As the bird wings and sings,
Let us cry "All good things
Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul!"

XIII

Therefore I summon age
To grant youth's heritage,
Life's struggle having so far reached its term:
Thence shall I pass, approved
A man, for aye removed
From the developed brute; a god tho' in the germ.

XIV

And I shall thereupon
Take rest, ere I be gone
Once more on my adventure brave and new:
Fearless and unperplexed,
When I wage battle next,
What weapons to select, what armor to indue.

XV

Youth ended, I shall try
My gain or loss thereby;
Leave the fire ashes, what survives is gold:
And I shall weigh the same,
Give life its praise or blame:
Young, all lay in dispute; I shall know, being old.

XVI

For, note when evening shuts,
A certain moment cuts
The deed off, calls the glory from the gray:
A whisper from the west
Shoots—"Add this to the rest,
Take it and try its worth: here dies another day."

XVII

So, still within this life,
Tho' lifted o'er its strife,
Let me discern, compare, pronounce at last,
"This rage was right i' the main,
That acquiescence vain:
The Future I may face now I have proved the Past."

XVIII

For more is not reserved
To man, with soul just nerved
To act to-morrow what he learns to-day:
Here, work enough to watch
The Master work, and catch
Hints of the proper craft, tricks of the tool's true play.

XIX

As it was better, youth
Should strive, thro' acts uncouth,
Toward making, than repose on aught found made:
So, better, age, exempt
From strife should know, than tempt
Further. Thou waitedst age: wait death nor be afraid!

XX

Enough now, if the Right
And Good and Infinite
Be named here, as thou callest thy hand thine own,
With knowledge absolute,
Subject to no dispute
From fools that crowded youth, nor let thee feel alone.

XXI

Be there, for once and all,
Severed great minds from small,
Announced to each his station in the Past!
Was I, the world arraigned,
Were they, my soul disdained,
Right? Let age speak the truth and give us peace at last!

XXII

Now, who shall arbitrate?
Ten men love what I hate,
Shun what I follow, slight what I receive;
Ten, who in ears and eyes
Match me: we all surmise,
They, this thing, and I, that: whom shall my soul believe?

XXIII

Not on the vulgar mass
Called "work," must sentence pass,
Things done, that took the eye and had the price:
O'er which, from level stand,
The low world laid its hand,
Found straightway to its mind, could value in a trice:

XXIV

But all, the world's coarse thumb
And finger failed to plumb,
So passed in making up the main account:
All instincts immature,
All purposes unsure,
That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's amount:

XXV

Thoughts hardly to be packed
Into a narrow act,
Fancies that broke thro' language and escaped:
All I could never be,
All, men ignored in me,
This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped.

XXVI

Ay, note that Potter's wheel,
That metaphor! and feel
Why time spins fast, why passive lies our clay,—
Thou, to whom fools propound,
When the wine makes its round,
"Since life fleets, all is change; the Past gone, seize to-day!"

XXVII

Fool! All that is, at all,
Lasts ever, past recall;
Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure:
What entered into thee,
That was, is, and shall be:
Time's wheel runs back or stops: Potter and clay endure.

XXVIII

He fixed thee mid this dance
Of plastic circumstance,
This Present, thou, forsooth, wouldst fain arrest:
Machinery just meant
To give thy soul its bent,
Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed.

XXIX

What tho' the earlier grooves
Which ran the laughing loves
Around thy base, no longer pause and press?
What though, about thy rim,
Skull-things in order grim
Grow out, in graver mood, obey the sterner stress?

XXX

Look not thou down but up!
To uses of a cup,
The festal board, lamp's flash and trumpet's peal,
The new wine's foaming flow,
The Master's lips a-glow!
Thou, heaven's consummate cup, what needst thou with earth's wheel?

XXXI

But I need, now as then,
Thee, God, who mouldest men;
And since, not even while the whirl was worst,
Did I,—to the wheel of life
With shapes and colors rife,
Bound dizzily,—mistake my end, to slake Thy thirst:

XXXII

So, take and use Thy work:
Amend what flaws may lurk,
What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim!
My times be in Thy hand!
Perfect the cup as planned!
Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same!

SAUL

I

Said Abner, "At last thou art come! Ere I tell, ere thou speak,
Kiss my cheek, wish me well!" Then I wished it, and did kiss his cheek.
And he, "Since the King, O my friend, for thy countenance sent,
Neither drunken nor eaten have we; nor until from his tent
Thou return with the joyful assurance the King liveth yet,
Shall our lip with the honey be bright, with the water be wet.
For out of the black mid-tent's silence, a space of three days,
Not a sound hath escaped to thy servants, of prayer nor of praise,

To betoken that Saul and the Spirit have ended their strife,
And that, faint in his triumph, the monarch sinks back upon life.

II

"Yet now my heart leaps, O beloved! God's child with his dew
On thy gracious gold hair, and those lilies still living and blue
Just broken to twine round thy harp-strings, as if no wild heat
Were now raging to torture the desert!"

III

Then I, as was meet,
Knelt down to the God of my fathers, and rose on my feet,
And ran o'er the sand burnt to powder. The tent was unlooped;
I pulled up the spear that obstructed, and under I stooped;
Hands and knees on the slippery grass-patch, all withered and gone,
That extends to the second enclosure, I groped my way on
Till I felt where the foldskirts fly open. Then once more I prayed,
And opened the foldskirts and entered, and was not afraid
But spoke, "Here is David, thy servant!" And no voice replied.
At the first I saw naught but the blackness; but soon I descried
A something more black than the blackness—the vast, the upright
Main prop which sustains the pavilion: and slow into sight

Grew a figure against it, gigantic and blackest of all.
Then a sunbeam, that burst thro' the tent-roof, showed Saul.

IV

He stood as erect as that tent-prop, both arms stretched out wide
On the great cross-support in the center, that goes to each side;
He relaxed not a muscle, but hung there as, caught in his pangs
And waiting his change, the king-serpent all heavily hangs,
Far away from his kind, in the pine, till deliverance come
With the spring-time,—so agonized Saul, drear and stark, blind and dumb.

V

Then I tuned my harp,—took off the lilies we twine round its chords
Lest they snap 'neath the stress of the noontide—those sunbeams like swords!
And I first played the tune all our sheep know, as, one after one,
So docile they come to the pen-door till folding be done.
They are white and untorn by the bushes, for lo, they have fed
Where the long grasses stifle the water within the stream's bed;
And now one after one seeks it lodging, as star follows star
Into eve and the blue far above us,—so blue and so far!

VI

—Then the tune, for which quails on the cornland will each leave his mate
To fly after the player; then, what makes the crickets elate

Till for boldness they fight one another: and then, what has weight
To set the quick jerboa a-musing outside his sand house—
There are none such as he for a wonder, half bird and half mouse!
God made all the creatures and gave them our love and our fear,
To give sign, we and they are his children, one family here.

VII

Then I played the help-tune of our reapers, their wine-song, when hand
Grasps at hand, eye lights eye in good friendship, and great hearts expand
And grow one in the sense of this world's life.—And then, the last song
When the dead man is praised on his journey—"Bear, bear him along
With his few faults shut up like dead flowerets! Are balm-seeds not here
To console us? The land has none left such as he on the bier.
"Oh, would we might keep thee, my brother!"—And then, the glad chaunt
Of the marriage,—first go the young maidens, next, she whom we vaunt
As the beauty, the pride of our dwelling.—And then, the great march
Wherein man runs to man to assist him and buttress an arch
Naught can break; who shall harm them, our friends?—Then, the chorus intoned

As the Levites go up to the altar in glory enthroned.
But I stopped here: for here in the darkness Saul groaned.

VIII

And I paused, held my breath in such silence, and listened apart;
And the tent shook, for mighty Saul shuddered: and sparkles 'gan dart
From the jewels that woke in his turban, at once with a start,
All its lordly male-sapphires, and rubies courageous at heart.
So the head: but the body still moved not, still hung there erect.
And I bent once again to my playing, pursued it unchecked,
As I sang,—

IX

"Oh, our manhood's prime vigor! No spirit feels waste,
Not a muscle is stopped in its playing nor sinew unbraced.
Oh, the wild joys of living! the leaping from rock up to rock,
The strong rending of boughs from the fir-tree, the cool silver shock
Of the plunge in a pool's living water, the hunt of the bear,
And the sultriness showing the lion is couched in his lair.
And the meal, the rich dates yellowed over with gold dust divine,
And the locust-flesh steeped in the pitcher, the full draught of wine,
And the sleep in the dried river-channel where bulrushes tell
That the water was wont to go warbling so softly and well.

How good is man's life, the mere living! how fit to employ
All the heart and the soul and the senses forever in joy!
Hast thou loved the white locks of thy father, whose sword thou didst guard
When he trusted thee forth with the armies, for glorious reward?
Didst thou see the thin hands of thy mother, held up as men sung
The low song of the nearly-departed, and hear her faint tongue
Joining in while it could to the witness, 'Let one more attest,
I have lived, seen God's hand thro' a lifetime, and all was for best!'
Then they sung thro' their tears in strong triumph, not much, but the rest.
And thy brothers, the help and the contest, the working whence grew
Such result as, from seething grape-bundles, the spirit strained true:
And the friends of thy boyhood—that boyhood of wonder and hope,
Present promise and wealth of the future beyond the eye's scope,—
Till lo, thou art grown to a monarch; a people is thine;
And all gifts, which the world offers singly, on one head combine!
On one head, all the beauty and strength, love and rage (like the throe
That, a-work in the rock, helps its labor and lets the gold go)
High ambition and deeds which surpass it, fame crowning them,—all
Brought to blaze on the head of one creature—King Saul!"

X

And lo, with that leap of my spirit,—heart, hand, harp and voice,
Each lifting Saul's name out of sorrow, each bidding rejoice
Saul's fame in the light it was made for—as when, dare I say,
The Lord's army, in rapture of service, strains thro' its array,
And upsoareth the cherubim-chariot—"Saul!" cried I, and stopped,
And waited the thing that should follow. Then Saul, who hung propped
By the tent's cross-support in the center, was struck by his name.
Have ye seen when Spring's arrowy summons goes right to the aim,
And some mountain, the last to withstand her, that held (he alone,
While the vale laughed in freedom and flowers) on a broad bust of stone
A year's snow bound about for a breastplate,—leaves grasp of the sheet?
Fold on fold all at once it crowds thunderously down to his feet,
And there fronts you, stark, black, but alive yet, your mountain of old,
With his rents, the successive bequeathings of ages untold—
Yea, each harm got in fighting your battles, each furrow and scar
Of his head thrust 'twixt you and the tempest—all hail, there they are!

—Now again to be softened with verdure, again hold the nest
Of the dove, tempt the goat and its young to the green on his crest
For their food in the ardors of summer. One long shudder thrilled
All the tent till the very air tingled, then sank and was stilled
At the King's self left standing before me, released and aware.
What was gone, what remained? All to traverse, 'twixt hope and despair.
Death was past, life not come: so he waited. Awhile his right hand
Held the brow, helped the eyes left too vacant forthwith to remand
To their place what new objects should enter: 't was Saul as before,
I looked up and dared gaze at those eyes, nor was hurt any more
Than by slow pallid sunsets in autumn, ye watch from the shore,
At their sad level gaze o'er the ocean—a sun's slow decline
Over hills which, resolved in stern silence, o'erlap and entwine
Base with base to knit strength more intensely: so, arm folded arm
O'er the chest whose slow heavings subsided.

XI

What spell or what charm,
(For, awhile there was trouble within me) what next should I urge
To sustain him where song had restored him? Song filled to the verge

His cup with the wine of this life, pressing all that it yields
Of mere fruitage, the strength and the beauty: beyond, on what fields,
Glean a vintage more potent and perfect to brighten the eye
And bring blood to the lip, and commend them the cup they put by?
He saith, "It is good;" still he drinks not: he lets me praise life,
Gives assent, yet would die for his own part.

XII

Then fancies grew rife
Which had come long ago on the pasture, when round me the sheep
Fed in silence—above, the one eagle wheeled slow as in sleep;
And I lay in my hollow and mused on the world that might lie
'Neath his ken, tho' I saw but the strip 'twixt the hill and the sky:
And I laughed—"Since my days are ordained to be passed with my flocks,
Let me people at least, with my fancies, the plains and the rocks,
Dream the life I am never to mix with, and image the show
Of mankind as they live in those fashions I hardly shall know!
Schemes of life, its best rules and right uses, the courage that gains,
And the prudence that keeps what men strive for." And now these old trains

Of vague thought came again; I grew surer; so, once more the string
Of my harp made response to my spirit, as thus—

XIII

"Yea, my King,"
I began—"thou dost well in rejecting mere comforts that spring
From the mere mortal life held in common by man and by brute:
In our flesh grows the branch of this life, in our soul it bears fruit.
Thou hast marked the slow rise of the tree,—how its stem trembled first
Till it passed the kid's lip, the stag's antler; then safely outburst
The fan-branches all round; and thou mindest when these too, in turn
Broke a-bloom and the palm-tree seemed perfect: yet more was to learn,
E'en the good that comes in with the palm-fruit. Our dates shall we slight,
When their juice brings a cure for all sorrow? or care for the plight
Of the palm's self whose slow growth produced them? Not so! stem and branch
Shall decay, nor be known in their place, while the palm-wine shall staunch
Every wound of man's spirit in winter. I pour thee such wine.
Leave the flesh to the fate it was fit for! the spirit be thine!
By the spirit, when age shall o'ercome thee, thou still shalt enjoy

More indeed, than at first when inconscious, the life of a boy.
Crush that life, and behold its wine running! Each deed thou hast done
Dies, revives, goes to work in the world; until e'en as the sun
Looking down on the earth, tho' clouds spoil him, tho' tempests efface,
Can find nothing his own deed produced not, must everywhere trace
The results of his past summer-prime,—so, each ray of thy will,
Every flash of thy passion and prowess, long over, shall thrill
Thy whole people, the countless, with ardor, till they too give forth
A like cheer to their sons, who in turn, fill the South and the North
With the radiance thy deed was the germ of. Carouse in the past!
But the license of age has its limit; thou diest at last:
As the lion when age dims his eyeball, the rose at her height,
So with man—so his power and his beauty forever take flight.
No! Again a long draught of my soul-wine! Look forth o'er the years!
Thou hast done now with eyes for the actual; begin with the seer's!
Is Saul dead? In the depth of the vale make his tomb—bid arise
A gray mountain of marble heaped four-square, till, built to the skies,

Let it mark where the great First King slumbers: whose
fame would ye know?
Up above see the rock's naked face, where the record shall
go
In great characters cut by the scribe,—Such was Saul, so
he did;
With the sages directing the work, by the populace chid,—
For not half, they 'll affirm, is comprised there! Which
fault to amend,
In the grove with his kind grows the cedar, whereon they
shall spend
(See, in tablets 't is level before them) their praise, and
record
With the gold of the graver, Saul's story,—the statesman's
great word
Side by side with the poet's sweet comment. The river 's
a-wave
With smooth paper-reeds grazing each other when prophet-
winds rave:
So the pen gives unborn generations their due and their
part
In thy being! Then, first of the mighty, thank God that
thou art!"

XIV

And behold while I sang . . . but O Thou who didst grant
me that day,
And before it not seldom hast granted thy help to essay,
Carry on and complete an adventure,—my shield and my
sword
In that act where my soul was thy servant, thy word was
my word,—

Still be with me, who then at the summit of human endeavor
And scaling the highest, man's thought could, gazed hopeless as ever
On the new stretch of heaven above me—till, mighty to save,
Just one lift of thy hand cleared that distance—God's throne from man's grave!
Let me tell out my tale to its ending—my voice to my heart
Which can scarce dare believe in what marvels last night I took part,
As this morning I gather the fragments, alone with my sheep,
And still fear lest the terrible glory evanish like sleep!
For I wake in the gray dewy covert, while Hebron upheaves
The dawn struggling with night on his shoulder, and Kidron retrieves
Slow the damage of yesterday's sunshine.

XV

I say then,—my song
While I sang thus, assuring the monarch, and ever more strong
Made a proffer of good to console him—he slowly resumed
His old motions and habitudes kingly. The right-hand replumed
His black locks to their wonted composure, adjusted the swathes
Of his turban, and see—the huge sweat that his countenance bathes,
He wipes off with the robe; and he girds now his loins as of yore,

And feels slow for the armlets of price, with the clasp set before.
He is Saul, ye remember in glory,—ere error had bent
The broad brow from the daily communion; and still, tho' much spent
Be the life and the bearing that front you, the same, God did choose,
To receive what a man may waste, desecrate, never quite lose.
So sank he along by the tent-prop, till, stayed by the pile
Of his armor and war-cloak and garments, he leaned there awhile,
And sat out my singing,—one arm round the tent-prop, to raise
His bent head, and the other hung slack—till I touched on the praise
I foresaw from all men in all time, to the man patient there;
And thus ended, the harp falling forward. Then first I was 'ware
That he sat, as I say, with my head just above his vast knees
Which were thrust out on each side around me, like oak-roots which please
To encircle a lamb when it slumbers. I looked up to know
If the best I could do had brought solace: he spoke not, but slow
Lifted up the hand slack at his side, till he laid it with care
Soft and grave, but in mild settled will, on my brow: thro' my hair
The large fingers were pushed, and he bent back my head, with kind power—
All my face back, intent to peruse it, as men do a flower.

Thus held he me there with his great eyes that scrutinized
mine—
And oh, all my heart how it loved him! but where was the
sign?
I yearned—"Could I help thee, my father, inventing a
bliss,
I would add, to that life of the past, both the future and this;
I would give thee new life altogether, as good, ages hence,
As this moment,—had love but the warrant, love's heart to
dispense!"

XVI

Then the truth came upon me. No harp more—no song
more! outbroke—

XVII

"I have gone the whole round of creation: I saw and I
spoke:
I, a work of God's hand for that purpose, received in my
brain
And pronounced on the rest of his handwork—returned
him again
His creation's approval or censure: I spoke as I saw:
I report, as man may of God's work—all 's love, yet all 's
law.
Now I lay down the judgeship he lent me. Each faculty
tasked
To perceive him has gained an abyss, where a dewdrop was
asked.
Have I knowledge? confounded it shrivels at Wisdom laid
bare.
Have I forethought? how purblind, how blank, to the In-
finite Care!

Do I task any faculty highest, to image success?
I but open my eyes,—and perfection, no more and no less,
In the kind I imagined, full-fronts me, and God is seen God
In the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the soul and the clod.
And thus looking within and around me, I ever renew
(With that stoop of the soul which in bending upraises it too)
The submission of man's nothing-perfect to God's all-complete,
As by each new obeisance in spirit, I climb to his feet.
Yet with all this abounding experience, this deity known,
I shall dare to discover some province, some gift of my own.
There 's a faculty pleasant to exercise, hard to hoodwink,
I am fain to keep still in abeyance, (I laugh as I think)
Lest, insisting to claim and parade in it, wot ye, I worst
E'en the Giver in one gift.—Behold, I could love if I durst!
But I sink the pretension as fearing a man may o'ertake
God's own speed in the one way of love: I abstain for love's sake.
—What, my soul? see thus far and no farther? when doors great and small,
Nine-and-ninety flew ope to our touch, should the hundredth appal?
In the least things have faith, yet distrust in the greatest of all?
Do I find love so full in my nature, God's ultimate gift,
That I doubt his own love can compete with it? Here, the parts shift?
Here, the creature surpass the Creator,—the end, what Began?

Would I fain in my impotent yearning do all for this man,
And dare doubt he alone shall not help him, who yet alone can?
Would it ever have entered my mind, the bare will, much less power,
To bestow on this Saul what I sang of, the marvellous dower
Of the life he was gifted and filled with? to make such a soul,
Such a body, and then such an earth for insphering the whole?
And doth it not enter my mind (as my warm tears attest)
These good things being given, to go on, and give one more, the best?
Ay, to save and redeem and restore him, maintain at the height
This perfection,—succeed with life's dayspring, death's minute of night?
Interpose at the difficult minute, snatch Saul the mistake,
Saul the failure, the ruin he seems now,—and bid him awake
From the dream, the probation, the prelude, to find himself set
Clear and safe in new light and new life,—a new harmony yet
To be run, and continued, and ended—who knows?—or endure!
The man taught enough by life's dream, of the rest to make sure;
By the pain-throb, triumphantly winning intensified bliss,
And the next world's reward and repose, by the struggles in this.

XVIII

"I believe it! 'T is thou, God, that givest, 't is I who receive:
In the first is the last, in thy will is my power to believe.
All 's one gift: thou canst grant it moreover, as prompt to my prayer
As I breathe out this breath, as I open these arms to the air.
From thy will, stream the worlds, life and nature, thy dread Sabaoth:
I will?—the mere atoms despise me! Why am I not loth
To look that, even that in the face too? Why is it I dare
Think but lightly of such impuissance? What stops my despair?
This;—'t is not what man Does which exalts him, but what man Would do!
See the King—I would help him, but cannot, the wishes fall through.
Could I wrestle to raise him from sorrow, grow poor to enrich,
To fill up his life, starve my own out, I would—knowing which,
I know that my service is perfect. Oh, speak thro' me now!
Would I suffer for him that I love? So wouldst thou—so wilt thou!
So shall crown thee the topmost, ineffablest, uttermost crown—
And thy love fill infinitude wholly, nor leave up nor down
One spot for the creature to stand in! It is by no breath,
Turn of eye, wave of hand, that salvation joins issue with death!

As thy Love is discovered almighty, almighty be proved
Thy power, that exists with and for it, of being Beloved!
He who did most, shall bear most; the strongest shall stand
the most weak.
'T is the weakness in strength, that I cry for! my flesh, that
I seek
In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul, it shall be
A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me,
Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever: a Hand like this
hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the
Christ stand!"

XIX

I know not too well how I found my way home in the night.
There were witnesses, cohorts about me, to left and to
right,
Angels, powers, the unuttered, unseen, the alive, the
aware:
I repressed, I got thro' them as hardly, as strugglingly there,
As a runner beset by the populace famished for news—
Life or death. The whole earth was awakened, hell loosed
with her crews;
And the stars of night beat with emotion, and tingled and
shot
Out in fire the strong pain of pent knowledge: but I fainted
not,
For the Hand still impelled me at once and supported, sup-
pressed
All the tumult, and quenched it with quiet, and holy be-
hest,
Till the rapture was shut in itself, and the earth sank to
rest.

Anon at the dawn, all that trouble had withered from earth—
Not so much, but I saw it die out in the day's tender birth;
In the gathered intensity brought to the gray of the hills;
In the shuddering forests' held breath; in the sudden wind-thrills;
In the startled wild beasts that bore off, each with eye sidling still
Tho' averted with wonder and dread; in the birds stiff and chill
That rose heavily, as I approached them, made stupid with awe:
E'en the serpent that slid away silent,—he felt the new law.
The same stared in the white humid faces upturned by the flowers;
The same worked in the heart of the cedar and moved the vine-bowers:
And the little brooks witnessing murmured, persistent and low,
With their obstinate, all but hushed voices—"E'en so, it is so!"

PROSPICE

Fear death?—to feel the fog in my throat,
The mist in my face,
When the snows begin, and the blasts denote
I am nearing the place,
The power of the night, the press of the storm,
The post of the foe;

Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form,
  Yet the strong man must go:
For the journey is done and the summit attained,
  And the barriers fall,
Tho' a battle 's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,
  The reward of it all.
I was ever a fighter, so—one fight more,
  The best and the last!
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forbore,
  And bade me creep past.
No! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers
  The heroes of old,
Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears
  Of pain, darkness and cold.
For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,
  The black minute 's at end,
And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave,
  Shall dwindle, shall blend,
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
  Then a light, then thy breast,
O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,
  And with God be the rest!

EPILOGUE TO "ASOLANDO"

At the midnight in the silence of the sleep-time,
  When you set your fancies free,
Will they pass to where—by death, fools think, imprisoned—
Low he lies who once so loved you, whom you loved so,
    —Pity me?

Oh to love so, be so loved, yet so mistaken!
What had I on earth to do
With the slothful, with the mawkish, the unmanly?
Like the aimless, helpless, hopeless, did I drivel
—Being—who?

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, tho' right were worsted, wrong would triumph,
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake.

No, at noonday in the bustle of man's work-time
Greet the unseen with a cheer!
Bid him forward, breast and back as either should be,
"Strive and thrive!" cry "Speed,—fight on, fare ever
There as here!"

NOTES AND COMMENT

(Heavy numerals refer to lines of the poems)

How They Brought the Good News (Page 3)

"There is no sort of historical foundation about *Good News from Ghent*," declared Browning. "I wrote it under the bulwark of a vessel off the African coast, after I had been at sea long enough to appreciate even the fancy of a gallop on the back of a certain good horse York, then in my stable at home." This and several similar statements by Browning show that the poem is not the ballad of the good news which saved Ghent, but a lyric expressive of Browning's own joy in the motion of his horse. In the tedium of the voyage his yearning for the exhilaration of a gallop spent itself through his art in the imaginary gallop with Roland, "my horse without peer." The horse is the hero of the poem and we thrill with the sense of his grand endeavor. The knowledge of the geography of those ninety miles can add little to the poem. Browning said: "I wrote the poem in pencil on the inside cover of Bartoli's *Simboli*, nearly the only book I had with me. This must account for and excuse the impossible distances (even for York) between place and place. I fancied that Ghent was invested, in extremity, and able at last to receive news of succor by some unsuspected line of road." The date, "16—," suggests that the poet gives his horse-hero an historical setting during the struggle of the Netherlands for liberation from the tyranny of Spain, but a knowledge of this history can contribute little to the appreciation of the lyric fervor of the poem. Browning has put into these lines all his love of a horse. This reappears elsewhere in his works, in his *Muleykeh*, in the old huntsman's love of horses in the *Flight of the Duchess*, and in the words of Luria, the Moorish soldier, laughing

> When his horse drops the forage from his teeth,
> And neighs to hear him hum his Moorish songs.

Contrast with this Longfellow's *Paul Revere*, James Buchanan Reed's *Sheridan's Ride*, and the stag hunt in the first canto of *The Lady of the Lake*. Scott's love of horses manifests itself repeatedly in his novels.

Miss Barrett's comment is worth quoting (Nov. 15, 1845):

"Then *The Ride* with that touch of natural feeling at the end, to prove that it was not in brutal carelessness that the poor horse was driven through all that suffering—yes, and how that one touch of softness acts back upon the energy and resolution and exalts both, instead of weakening anything, as might have been expected by the vulgar of writers or critics."

One day Browning addressed a fair young lady as she returned with her companions from a ride. "And did you gallop?" he asked. She replied, "I galloped, Joyce galloped, we galloped all three." Browning joined the laughter at the witty repartee, and beating the time of the galloping horses' feet on the table with his fingers, he repeated the exact measure in Latin from Vergil. "Why not borrow from Vergil as I did?" he asked. "He is as rich as one of your gold mines, while I am but a poor scribe."

Cavalier Tunes (Page 6)

These present dramatically the spirit and character of the royalists who during the English Civil War defended the rights of King Charles. The Cavaliers were largely drawn from the landed gentry and the nobles, and were well born and well bred, courtly and loyal to the King personally, despising and defying the people's leaders and the people's cause. Browning studied this period of history while assisting John Forster to complete his *Life of Strafford*, and then wrote his own drama of *Strafford*. The *Tunes* were a mere by-product of the larger work, thrown off rapidly to express the poet's conception of the fiery political passion of the defenders of Charles, just as an historian who was writing the epic or drama of our Civil War might, throw off incidentally short stories or sketches.

The first is the rallying song to the King's standard at Nottingham

in 1642; a regiment of "great-hearted gentlemen" under Sir Byng, are "marching along, fifty score strong," exalting the King, scorning the "crop-headed Parliament," and cursing those "pestilent carles," the leaders of the people.

The second is a drinking song, a health to King Charles, when the tide of war has already turned against the King. It is led by a grizzled old royalist, whose goods and gold, the gift of the King, are spent, flung away, and whose boy George cheered and laughed "while Noll's damned troopers shot him." Yet his loyalty is unabated and he shouts a hoarse defiance against the King's foes.

Boot and Saddle, originally entitled *My Wife Gertrude*, is an early morning call "To saddle," stirring the bivouac of a small troop of mounted Cavaliers in the closing months of the war. The leader has just received news that his wife Gertrude in Brancepeth Castle, forty miles away, is surrounded by the "Roundheads' array"; he feels confident that she "laughs when you talk of surrendering," so he rallies his troop to the rescue.

The style of these songs is rough and strong in accord with the uproarious, daredevil spirit of the singers. The first is in a four-accented dactylic line, imitative of the rhythm of the cantering of the regiment of horse. *Boot and Saddle* is in the same meter adapted to the quicker rhythm of a gallop, the movement being set by the initial staccato words of command to mount, which should be read with due intervals to keep this rhythm. *Give a Rouse* is in three accented anapestic lines with double rime; and gets its character from the roar of the rouse, which strikes full strength on the name of Charles.

I

7, 13, and **14. Pym—Hampden—Hazelrig—Fiennes—young Harry.** John Pym, John Hampden, Sir Arthur Hazelrig, Nathaniel Fiennes, and Sir Henry Vane, Jr., were leaders of the parliamentary party against the King and his cause.

15. Rupert: Prince Robert of Bavaria, commonly known as Prince Rupert, a nephew of the King. He was a gallant but reckless leader of the King's cavalry.

II

16. Noll: the nickname of Cromwell, the master spirit of the opposition to the King. His troopers, the Ironsides, made him famous as a soldier.

III

10. Castle Brancepeth: in the County of Durham.

10. Roundheads: the nickname given to the King's foes, because of their close-cropped hair. Compare the "crop-headed Parliament," line 2 of the previous poem.

Why I am a Liberal (Page 9)

This sonnet was prefixed in 1886 to an essay of the same title by Mr. Andrew Reid. It was never included by Browning in his collected works, and is his only personal expression on public affairs.

The Lost Leader (Page 9)

This poem is a far earlier expression of Browning's political faith, though he hides his own identity behind the slightly dramatic mask. An ardent liberal is expressing his regret for the political defection from the cause of liberty of the lost leader, who had sold out for a "handful of silver," or a "riband to stick in his coat." Browning had referred to such defection in his *Strafford* and in the traitor Charles of the *Italian in England*. But readers immediately began identifying Wordsworth or Southey as the leader in the poet's mind. When pressed on this point the poet said: "I can only answer with something of shame and contrition that I undoubtedly did have Wordsworth in my mind—but simply as a model; you know an artist takes one or two striking traits in the features of his model and uses them to start his fancy on a flight, which may end far enough from the good man or woman who happens to be sitting for nose and eye. I thought of the great poet's abandonment of liberalism at an unlucky juncture, and no repaying consequence that I could ever see. But once call my fancy portrait Wordsworth—and how much more

one ought to say." That is, Browning is thinking of political apostasy from noble ideals, the abandoning of pure, generous political faith for sordid gain, a failure which repeats itself in all lands and all ages, and Browning prefers to leave the portrait undesignated in time and place. Was he artistically right in doing so?

"Of the new poems," writes Miss Barrett, "I like supremely . . . that *Lost Leader*—which strikes so broadly and so deep—which nobody can ever forget—and which is worth all the journalizing and pamphleteering in the world." What does Miss Barrett mean by the last statement?

The Patriot (Page 11)

This "old story" shows us the patriot statesman passing to his death as a political martyr at the Shambles Gate. He is the very antithesis of the Lost Leader. Browning is concerned in showing the very heart of the man in his martyrdom, and he is supposed not so much to be speaking to some one, as merely to be thinking. "A year ago this very day," he had been the idol of the people, but his year of faithful service had ended in disaster. He is on his way to doom. "They fling, whoever has a mind, stones at me for my year's misdeeds." Yet he is neither angry, nor bitter, nor cynical, nor afraid; for in the consciousness of his own rectitude he can trust that "God shall repay: I am safer so."

How does Browning convince the reader that he is showing a patriot martyr, rather than a traitor going to a just doom? Would the patriot's story be more effective from the lips of an outsider? —or if the historic account of his public service and of his betrayal were made plain to us?

Incident of the French Camp (Page 12)

The poet here records an incident in Napoleon's campaign of 1809, in Bavaria, the gallantry of the deed having arrested his attention here as it did in *Hervé Riel*, without regard to any narrow national prejudices. It is significant to the poet not merely for the gallant pride of the boy who "with breast all but shot in two," bears the

word of victory to his general, but for the glimpse of Napoleon in the passion of his martial ambition and glory, as "his plans soared up again like fire," yet checking all this with the finer and rarer touch of human pity for the wounded boy before him. The actual messenger at Ratisbon was a man, not a boy. What did Browning gain artistically by this modification of fact? Does the incident gain anything from the person of the narrator?

The Italian in England (Page 14)

Browning here records his impression of the Italian political exile who had fought unsuccessfully for the liberation of Italy from Austrian tyranny. Like the Finn and the Pole to-day, the Italian of 1840 was devoted to "the dear lost land" with a passionate ardor. These patriots finally freed Italy in 1861. Mazzini may have been the patriot who sat for this picture, and it is said he was greatly pleased with the poem. Browning, like most English Liberals, sympathized with the struggle of Italy for freedom, and he employs his art to picture this high-minded patriot who tells to an English friend the story of his escape after the disastrous failure, probably of 1824,

> That second time they hunted me,
> From hill to plain, from shore to sea.

Yet Browning is not telling a story of thrilling adventure, he is thinking of the passion of the man for Italy, his hatred which would

> grasp Metternich until
> I felt his red wet throat distil
> In blood through these two hands;

the scorn for his brothers who, lost to the cause, live in Austria's pay, and his faith in

> that woman's face,
> Its calm simplicity of grace,
> Our Italy's own attitude.

The lost cause is never utterly lost while such men live.

Would it have been better to have made the time and place of the escape of the Italian, and the historic circumstance of the defeated insurrection more plain to the reader? What does the portrait

of the peasant woman add to the poem and to the character of the narrator? Why does the artist prefer to use the revolutionary spirit softened by the flight of time rather than in the heat of conflict?

8, 11, 20, 116, and 125. Charles. This probably refers to Carlo Alberto, a Prince of the house of Savoy, who for a time espoused the cause of liberation for Italy, but later became a lost leader.

19 and 121. Metternich. This famous Austrian minister and diplomatist was a cruel foe to the liberators.

76. Tenebræ: a part of the liturgical service for Holy Week.

Hervé Riel (Page 19)

During his vacation rambles in Brittany, Browning came upon the story of Hervé Riel, the Breton pilot who had saved the remnant of the French fleet, under command of Admiral Damfreville, fugitives after the crushing defeat off Cape La Hogue, May 19, 1692, by piloting them safely out of reach of the English, through the shallows of the river Rance, till they lay safely under the guns of the fortress of Solidor at St. Malo. The gallant act caught Browning's fancy all the more because it was the act of a mere common sailor, whose fame had soon been lost. He wrote his ballad as a tribute and memorial. It was published in the *Cornhill Magazine*, March, 1871, and Browning sent the £100 received for it to the Paris Relief Fund, to provide for the suffering in Paris after the Siege. It was significant that Browning spoke this word of tribute to a French hero in the hour of France's bitterest defeat, at the close of the Franco-Prussian War. Browning recites this story of French heroic patriotism, and the Greek patriotism of Pheidippides, but never celebrates an English hero or victory, as did Tennyson in *The Fleet*, *The Revenge*, *The Defense of Lucknow*, and the *Charge of the Light Brigade*.

Several years after the publication of this poem, Browning's attention was called to the fact that the historic Hervé Riel had demanded not a day's furlough, but "unconditional discharge, that he might rejoin his wife, whom he called *La Belle Aurore*." He replied—"You are undoubtedly right . . . an absolute discharge seems to approach

in importance a substantial reward. Still—truth above all things." Why does Browning imply preference for the *unsubstantial* reward given in the poem? What is the significance of his "truth above all things"? What is Browning's conception of the character of Hervé Riel? Do you see any good reason for the fact that Browning here abandons the dramatic monologue and presents the incident in direct narrative? Could Hervé Riel have told the incident effectively? Could Damfreville have done so? What is the nature and purpose of stanza xi?

18. Twelve and eighty: a literal translation of the French idiom, *quatre-vingt-douze.*

44. Croisickese: dweller in the little town of Croisic in Brittany.

46. Malouins: dwellers in Saint Malo, at the mouth of the Rance.

49, 61, 86. Grève: the perilous sands at the river's mouth.

Pheidippides (Page 25)

This poem gives Browning's artistic realization of an historic incident connected with the battle of Marathon (490 B. C.) in which he feels, and by his art makes the reader feel, the patriotic ardor which won the battle and saved Greece and Europe from Persia. Herodotus, writing half a century after the battle, says: "And first, before they left Athens, the generals sent off to Sparta a herald, one Pheidippides, who was by birth an Athenian, and by profession and practice a runner. This man, according to the account which he gave the Athenians on his return, when he was near Mount Parthenium above Tegea, fell in with the god Pan, who called him by his name, and bade him ask the Athenians, 'wherefore they neglected him so entirely, when he was kindly disposed towards them, and had often helped them in times past, and would do so again in time to come?' The Athenians believing entirely in the truth of this report, as soon as their affairs were once more in good order, set up a temple to Pan under the Acropolis. On the occasion of which we speak . . . Pheidippides reached Sparta on the very next day after

quitting the city of Athens. Upon his arrival, he went before the rulers, and said to them: 'Men of Lacadæmon, the Athenians beseech you to hasten to their aid, and not allow that state, which is the most ancient in all Greece, to be enslaved by the barbarians. Eretria, look you, is already carried away captive, and Greece weakened by the loss of no mean city.' . . . The Spartans wished to help the Athenians, but were unable to give them any present succor, as they did not like to break their established law. It was the ninth day of the first decade, and they could not march out of Sparta on the ninth, when the moon had not reached the full. So they waited for the full of the moon."

Browning has used his art of monologue writing to make real to the reader the scene in Sparta and the interview between Pan and Pheidippides. He imagines Pheidippides addressing the archons, rulers of Athens, telling them on his return of what he had seen. The man is all afire with the patriotism of the hour, and with splendid heroism stands for the Greece which a few days later won Marathon.

The latter part of the poem, lines 89–120, is supposed to be spoken by another narrator, Miltiades, telling the glorious end of Pheidippides, which was recorded by Lucian: "The first to use this phrase (*Rejoice, we conquer*) is said to have been Pheidippides, when on one day he ran from Marathon to Athens to announce the news of the victory to the magistrates who were sitting in great anxiety about the outcome of the battle. 'Rejoice, we conquer!' Having said this, he fell dead in the very act of delivering his message, and expired with the word 'Rejoice' on his lips."

Think then of the spent runner, after his one hundred and forty mile run to save Athens, greeting the Gods and the sacred memories of Athens, addressing her rulers, and waving the bit of fennel as pledge of Pan's promised aid. His words glow with passion—the zeal which declared "over the hills, under the dales, down pits and up peaks, did I burn," which tells of his appeal to Sparta, while "every face of her leered in a furrow of envy, mistrust, and malice," of the fierce indignation that spurred him on through the long return to Athens, of the heart astorm with conflicting passions until "there, in the cool of the cleft," he met the god Pan. And what is the return

due for such ardor, Browning questions. Here, as in *Hervé Riel*, and in the little plait of hair given by the Duchess to her servitor, Browning rejects "substantial reward." With a touch of romanticism, which is not at all Greek, Browning suggests "to marry a certain maid, hie me to house and home." But after all, Pheidippides' final reward was to utter those greatest of all words to Athens in her hour of crisis, *Rejoice, we conquer.*

What is the effect of having the story told by Pheidippides himself instead of by Miltiades or some Greek poet (compare Peter Ronsard in *The Glove*), or by some common onlooker? Does the poet concern himself with the surrounding Athenian crowd? Why is this Marathon race to death interpreted as the due reward of Pheidippides? Compare Browning's version of another Marathon story in *Ecethlos*.

1–8. This stanza is an invocation to the river Ilyssus flowing under the walls of Athens, to the Acropolis, her citadel, to the gods Jupiter, Minerva, and Diana, and finally to Pan. Prof. J. W. Cunliffe writes: "All this is entirely accurate from the archæological point of view, and it is artistically effective, because it gives us the Athenian atmosphere at the outset. But once this first impression is made, Browning pays no more attention to history, geography, or archæology."

2. Dæmons: in the Greek sense of attendant spirits.

9. Archons: the rulers of Athens, with the badge of the *tettix*, or golden grasshopper, a symbol of noble birth.

18. Slaves' tribute, water and earth. These symbols of submission were commonly demanded by Asiatic despots from their tributaries.

19. Eretria: one of the chief cities on the island of Eubœa. It lay in the path of the Persian army and had already been destroyed.

20, 72. Hellas: Greece.

31. Athené: Pallas Athené, the patron goddess of Athens, for whom the city was named.

32. Phoibos: Phœbus Apollo, the god of the sun.

32. Artemis: Diana, the goddess of the chase.

33. Olumpos: Olympus. The poet uses the Greek spelling for the name of this mount of the gods.

47. filleted victim: the garlanded animal for sacrifice.

47. fulsome libation: the drink offering of wine poured out to the gods.

49. Oak and olive and bay. Garlands of oak, olive, and bay were regarded as the due enwreathing of the brows of Zeus, Pallas Athené, and Phœbus Apollo, respectively.

52, 57, 86. Parnes. Browning changes the scene from Mount Parthenium to Mount Parnes, in northern Attica, quite out of the course of the return journey from Sparta. Professor Cunliffe suggests that the poet prefers a mountain in Attica as truer to the patriotic spirit of the anecdote.

62. Erebos: the unknown darkness beneath the world.

69. Goat-thighs. Pan is represented as having the nether limbs of a goat. Compare "The Goat-God," line 77, and "goat-thigh," line 80.

81. This, foreshowing the place: the famous battle-field of Marathon was so named from the abundance of fennel (Greek *marathon*) which grew there; hence the fennel field, line 109.

87. The razor's edge: an adaptation of the common Greek figure for a precarious condition.

89. Miltiades: the archon who a few days later led the Athenians to victory

106. To Akropolis: that is, back to Athens.

Home Thoughts from Abroad (Page 31)

This poem, written during the poet's trip to Italy in 1844, expresses his love of the natural beauty of England. From youth he had delighted in nature, spending long days in field and wood, and becoming intimately acquainted with her. There was some homesickness in the longing

> Oh, to be in England
> Now that April's there.

The thickets in "tiny leaf," the "chaffinch in the orchard," and the "wise thrush" are with him in fancy, and he contrasts the buttercups with the "gaudy melon-flower" which flaunts before his eye.

As in the *Ride from Ghent*, the poet gratifies a yearning by a fancied joy through his art. Miss Barrett wrote to Browning: "Your spring song is full of beauty, as you know very well—and 'that 's the wise thrush,' so characteristic of you (and of the thrush too) that I was sorely tempted to ask you to write it 'twice over.'"

Home Thoughts from the Sea (Page 32)

These lines were written during the poet's voyage to Italy in 1838, as the ship was passing the four memorials of England's greatness by sea—St. Vincent and Trafalgar where Nelson had won undying fame, Cadiz where Elizabethan sea-dogs had bearded the Spaniard, and Gibraltar, the fortress which stands as the monument of the stability of England's power. Browning's heart thrilled at the thought of all the memories associated with them till he asked "how can I help England?" This is almost the sole utterance in poetry of Browning's patriotism, while Tennyson was continually chanting British glory. Miss Barrett speaks of "those grand sea-sights in long lines."

Up at a Villa (Page 32)

This is Browning's humorous fancy of the man who is drawn city-ward, fascinated by city excitement, the mania of our modern world, but is checked in turn by the prohibitive cost of living, a world old human problem repeating itself in all lands and all ages. Browning may have realized this personally during the earlier Casa Guidi residence, as he was poor enough to feel the pinch of high city prices. Though he chose an "Italian man of quality" to voice this bit of human nature, Browning shared with him this delight in the rush and turmoil and excitement of the city, and was always a city dweller. What does the poem gain by its Italian setting?

4. By Bacchus: an adaptation of the common Italian oath *corpo di Bacco*.

39. Diligence: the mail-coach.

42. Pulcinello: the Punch and Judy show.

56. Tax upon salt, etc.: the city tariffs on imports, unknown in America, but still practiced in many European cities.

Confessions (Page 37)

These lines are a whimsical answer to the grave question of the reverend sir: "Do I view the world as a vale of tears?" Browning always rejected this cant of denying the good of the world.

> Have you found your life distasteful?
> My life did, and does, smack sweet

is his assertion in *At the Mermaid*. And again he makes Fra Lippo Lippi say:

> This world 's no blot for us,
> Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good:
> To find its meaning is my meat and drink.

Instead of treating the question seriously here, he applies his art in the grotesque to laugh it away. The speaker is dying, but has not lost his quaint sense of humor. To the questions of his ghostly confessor, he gives the essence of his own life in the memory of a sweet but stolen romance of long years ago, which now mingles itself with the medicine bottles and the meager furnishings of the room. His "poor mind 's out of tune," but he stands again "by the rose-wreathed gate," and can only exclaim

> How sad and bad and mad it was—
> But then, how it was sweet!

A Face (Page 38)

These lines, giving the effect of a beautiful girl's face on the fancy of Browning, were inscribed by the poet in the autograph album of Emily Augusta Patmore, Oct. 11, 1852. He seems to try to reproduce in words the art effects of those portraits,

> Painted upon a background of pale gold,
> Such as the Tuscan's early art prefers!

Evelyn Hope (Page 39)

Evelyn Hope and *Love Among the Ruins* represent a considerable number of dramatic love poems in Browning's work, which differ

from the usual types of personal and romantic love poetry. His poems are not personal utterances of love; for as Browning declares in *One Word More* and *At the Mermaid*, he was little inclined to give the world his "joys and sorrows, hopes and . . . disbelievings." Nor are they romantic stories of passion such as had delighted the readers of Scott and Byron; nor romantic idylls like Tennyson's *Miller's Daughter* and *Gardener's Daughter*. They are *studies* of love in its various phases and effects within the soul, and Browning was bent on revealing the way love, as a spark from heaven, ennobled the soul which was true to it, or brought ruin to the one who betrayed it for inferior joys or ambitions. For his purposes the failures or disappointments of love were quite as significant as its successes. Browning never threw around the passion of love that unreal romantic halo so common to love literature, but treated it with almost severe realism as he scrutinized how the soul received this spark of heavenly light.

Evelyn Hope is one of these studies. Love may be thwarted in many ways,—by false ambition, by selfishness, as he reveals elsewhere. Here it is thwarted by death. Evelyn Hope in her charm of girlhood has awakened love in the heart of this middle-aged scholarly lover, though she has been quite unconscious of it. If success in love means nothing save in the acknowledged return of love, then this lover has failed. But Browning in several poems shows his belief that love has won if it is true from but one side. Browning felt that even the intervention of death could not ruin love. Hence he seats the lover of Evelyn Hope quietly by the side of the dead girl, thinking of all the charm of her youth, thinking of the fullness and power of his own life as he had

> Gained me the gains of various men,
> Ransacked the ages, spoiled the climes;

Thinking too of the

> one thing in my soul's full scope,
> Either I missed, or itself missed me,

until he can rise at last to the faith that their love will yet be realized.

I claim you still for my own love's sake.
. . . . . .
Much is to learn, much to forget
Ere the time be come for taking you.

Why should Browning use this thoughtful middle-aged man rather than a Romeo to utter the truth of this poem? How does Browning succeed in impressing us with the charm of person and character in the dead girl? Would the poem gain in effect if we knew more of the earlier life of the girl and her lover, and of their touch with one another?

Love Among the Ruins (Page 41)

In this poem Browning neither tells a story nor presents a character; he improvises with all the resources of poetry to adorn the one crowning thought, "Love is best." It is a deliberate, thoughtful valuation by the lover of his passion for the girl who will await him in "the single little turret," as compared with the pomp and glory of the imperial city, which, after its "centuries of folly, noise and sin," lies desolate around him. Which is best? The glory of that great city has vanished and nature has been slowly spreading her obliterating mantle over it all, until nothing is left but a background for this eternal passion of love. Thomas Nelson Page has made a similar comparison of the ruined civilizations of ancient days with the permanency of song in his *Theocritus on Agradina*, published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, August, 1906.

The spacious cities hummed with toil;
The monarch reared his towers to the skies;
Men delved the fruitful soil
And studied to be wise.
Along the highway's rocky coil
The mailéd legions rang;
Smiling unheeded mid the moil
The Poet sang.

The glittering cities long are heaps;
The starry towers lie level with the plain;
The desert serpent sleeps
Where soared the marble fane.

The stealthy, bead-eyed lizard creeps
Where gleamed the Tyrant's throne;
That grandeur dark Oblivion steeps,
The song sings on.

Five accented lines form the running text of *Love Among the Ruins*, while the short line, usually a detached phrase, serves as a refrain or echo, and should be read with deliberation to keep the movement of the poem as a whole.

While Browning indicates that the ruined city is an ancient Roman city, he does not specifically name it. Why not? Does this help or hinder the poem? He also fails to identify the lovers by name or otherwise. Why? To what purpose and feeling does the poet use nature description in the poem?

One Word More (Page 44)

This "great love-canticle," as it is called by Professor Herford, was written as a dedicatory epilogue for *Men and Women*, 1855, a volume which includes fifty of Browning's most notable dramatic poems,—"Karshish, Cleon, Norbet, Lippo, Roland, and Andrea" men and women,

Live or dead or fashioned by my fancy,
Enter each and all and use their service,
Speak from every mouth, the speech a poem.

In this poem, "for the first time, and the last time," he declares, he will speak in his own person, and yet there are but few lines which are frankly personal. "He strips off the veil of his art," says Professor Herford, "and speaks in his own person only to declare that speech is needless." He prefers to illustrate the truth concerning love, which he has found in his own experience, by example drawn from other lives.

The key-truth of the poem is found in the lines:

God be thanked, the meanest of his creatures
Boasts two soul-sides, one to face the world with,
One to show a woman when he loves her.

To the world, he was Robert Browning, the poet; but there was a more intimate side of his personality which was open to his wife, but which never found voice in his poetry:

> Hardly shall I tell my joys and sorrows,
> Hopes and fears, belief and disbelieving:
> I am mine and yours, the rest be all men's.

Hence came a yearning within himself and within other artists to find for their love a language, "fit and fair and simple and sufficient." Mrs. Browning had thus found voice in her *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. He evidently felt that his dramatic art was quite incapable of saying what he wished to say to her, and he longed for a more perfect expression.

He illustrates his own feeling by four examples, by the loves of Raphael, Dante, and Moses, and by his fancy of the moon as a lover. Was Raphael a painter of Madonnas for the world? He would be a poet for his beloved. Was Dante a poet for the world? He would paint an angel for Beatrice. Was Moses a prophet and lawgiver to the children of Israel? He "would fain put off the prophet." Even the moon, Browning declares, would turn a new side to her lover.

5. Rafael made, etc. The anecdote concerning Raphael seems to be fictitious. He was devoted to Margherita, La Fornerina, whose likeness appears in several of his pictures, but there is no evidence that he addressed her in a sonnet series.

22–24. The *Madonna di San Sisto* in the Dresden Gallery, the *Madonna di Foligno* in the Vatican, the *Madonna del Granduca* in Florence, "represented as appearing to a votary in a vision," and *La Belle Jardiniere* in the Louvre.

26–28. No such book of Raphael's sonnets is known, but Guido Reni possessed a volume of a hundred designs drawn by Raphael, which he left to his heir Signorini.

32–49. Dante says in his *Vita Nuova:* "On that day which fulfilled the year since my lady had been made of the citizens of the eternal life, remembering me of her as I sat alone, I betook myself to draw the resemblance of an angel on certain tablets. And while I did this, chancing to turn my head, I perceived that

some were standing beside me to whom I should have given courteous welcome, and that they were observing what I did. Also I learned afterward that they had been there a while before I perceived them. Perceiving whom I rose for salutation, and said, 'Another was with me.'" How has Browning changed the tone of Dante's narrative? What purpose does this serve?

33 and **54. Beatrice.** Browning evidently intended, as the meter demonstrates, that the name Beatrice should be pronounced in four syllables, as in Italian, Bé-a-trí-che. The abbreviated endearing form of the name, Bice, line 57, should be pronounced Beé-che.

45. The folk of his Inferno. Dante gave his foes place in these regions of gloom.

58–72. The reason given here may or may not have been true of Raphael and Dante; it is certainly true of Browning, who desired to

> Put to proof art alien to the artist,
> Once and only once and for one only;

that he might express those deeper affections which he habitually excluded from his public verse. Dante certainly offers no such reason and frequently mentions his love for Beatrice.

73–95. The reason for this is given in the example of Moses; "Heaven's gift," whether it be that of poet or prophet, "takes earth's abatement," is discounted by earthly associations and considerations. Browning reads more deeply into the hidden feeling of Moses than is revealed in the text of the *Pentateuch*, but he was probably speaking of his own bitter memories of the scornful and unsympathetic criticism that he had to endure in large measure for many years.

96–99. How would Browning interpret this stanza in terms of his own life as poet?

101–102. Jethro's daughter—the Ethiopian bond-slave. See *Exodus* ii, 21, and *Numbers* xii, 1.

144–168. Even the moon which had accompanied their journey from Italy to England in 1855 can afford him a symbol for his thought. So he speaks of "the old sweet mythos" of the

moon in love with a mortal. Even she, he declares, "would turn a new side to her mortal."

148. **Fiesole:** the ancient hill-town overlooking Florence.

150. **Samminiato:** a famous church in Florence.

163. **Zoroaster:** the Persian sage and astronomer who had given form and thought to the religion of Persia.

164. **Galileo:** the famous astronomer of Florence.

165. **Homer:** who celebrates the moon in his Hymn to Diana.

165. **Keats—him even:** Keats, whose *Endymion* tells the fable of Endymion's love for the moon.

174. **Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu:** see *Exodus* xxiv, 1–10.

169, 172. **Proves she—proves she:** introducing coördinate clauses—whether she be bane or blessing.

188. **My moon of poets.** In a letter of August 4, 1845, he speaks of her as "the moon's regality."

188–197. Browning strongly admired his wife's poetry but his *love* was devoted to her spiritual womanhood rather than her genius, that deeper self which lay behind her work as poet, and which was but slightly known to the world. In a letter under date of November 10, 1845, he writes: "I believed in your glorious genius and knew it for a true star from the moment I saw it; long before I had the blessing of knowing it was MY star, with my fortune and futurity in it. And, when I draw back from myself, and look better and more clearly, then I do feel, with you, that the writing a few letters more or less, reading many or few rimes of any other person, would not interfere in any material degree with that power of yours—that you might easily make one so happy and yet go on writing *Geraldines* and *Berthas*—but how can I, dearest, leave my heart's treasures long, even to look at your genius?"

My Star (Page 52)

This poem may be taken as a lyrical pendant of stanza xvi of *One Word More* in which the poet asserts that the moon would present to one it loved a face different from that the world sees. So this star

will dartle blue and red, because "it has opened its soul," but all this will be unseen even by friends.

For all, love greatens and glorifies
Till God 's aglow to the loving eyes,
In what was mere earth before.

James Lee's Wife—On the Cliff (Page 52)

On the Cliff is but a reassertion of the same truth under a different figure and from a somewhat different angle. Here love overmasters even the sense of the ignobility of the one beloved. The cricket on the turf, the butterfly on the rock are to the poet symbols of the transformation of the "level and low, the burnt and bare" by the coming of love.

Summum Bonum (Page 54)

In this poem he reasserted at seventy-seven what he had said forty years earlier in *Love Among the Ruins*, "love is best." It is one of a series of remarkable love poems in the closing volume of the poet.

The Laboratory (Page 55)

This is one of a series of studies of morbid passion written by Browning during the earlier years of his art, portraying with strong dramatic sense a series of persons utterly remote from his own wholesome, optimistic nature. The stories and personages are in each case entirely fictitious, but they are true typically of the various ages and countries represented. They are mere sketches resulting from Browning's reading of history.

The Laboratory gives a glimpse of one of those corrupt ages when poisoning was practiced as a fine art; imperial Rome and Renaissance Italy were alike infamous in this art, and from the latter, the Elizabethan dramatists drew many a gruesome story for the stage. Compare the poisoned rapier of Hamlet and the Queen's attempts in *Cymbeline*. Browning, however, preferred to use France under the old regime, when this Italianate vice had been imported into the northern court.

The scene is graphically real. The slight girl in full evening dress, adorned with her jewels for the dance at the King's, is talking in the laboratory to the grim, sullen old chemist. She has gone to him for a poison with which to poison her rival, the large, splendid beauty who had stolen her lover and laughed at her while doing it. Fierce, murderous jealousy has taken possession of the fair young creature, until she is all but insane. She exults in the thought of her rival lying dead at her feet. In her ecstasy of hate as she snatches the deadly mixture, she kisses the old man and presses upon him a rich jewel, her whole fortune's fee; then hastens away to dance at the King's.

Is such a picture of hatred justifiable artistically? To what extent does Browning explain the causes of her jealousy? How can you elaborate the story of the lover and the two ladies to explain the hatred more fully? If this is regarded as a single scene from a whole tragic drama, how would you reconstruct the remainder of the drama? Tell the story of the preceding scene when the lady had been jilted by her lover and ridiculed by her triumphant rival. Tell how she used the poison, and ended the tragedy.

Count Gismond (Page 57)

Browning has here taken one of the commonplaces of the tales of chivalry,—the rescue of a wronged maiden, such as Ivanhoe's rescue of Rebecca; but he has made something new out of it by his method of treatment. Such stories have usually been told for the thrilling narrative, or for elaborately picturesque description. But Browning puts these aside and asks one question. How did the victim feel when the iron of this cruel accusation entered her soul, and how did the rescue touch the deeper springs of her womanhood? Not what the man did, but what the woman felt was of primary importance. With characteristic chivalry he defended the woman's honor. The story seems to have been of Browning's invention, and shows the working of his mind on the tale of chivalry. "The motive of the poem," writes Dowden, "is essentially that of the Perseus and Andromeda myth refined upon and medievalized."

The woman herself, after the flight of several years, is telling the

story to her bosom friend, Adela, in a rare burst of confidence. By some sudden rise of feeling she had exclaimed

> Christ God who savest man, save most
> Of men Count Gismond, who saved me!

Then the story of the rescue, which has probably never before passed her lips, comes spontaneously. She implies rather than tells of her orphanage, not without its girlish happiness among her cousins. How unaffectedly in the third stanza she assures her reader of her beauty! We catch a hint of the jealousy against her and of the dark intrigue to slay her honor and her lovely maidenhood. Of the lists themselves and the progress of the tourney—a literary opportunity which Scott and the Romanticists would have seized for elaborate word pictures and for thrilling incident—she has little to say. For her, only a few moments of that day live in her memory—the frightful shock of Gauthier's false accusation, Gismond's "back-handed blow" that slew the lie, the brief encounter of the two knights, Gismond kneeling before her for the moment, and then at her side as they "two walked forth to nevermore return." Only the incidents which reveal character at the crisis are retained. The reader must picture the scene for himself, if he is more interested in that than in the woman's feelings.

Compare with this poem the romantic stories of Scott, Keats, and Shelley in *Lochinvar*, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, and *The Fugitives*, and the elopement in Longfellow's *Skeleton in Armor*.

Miss Barrett, in telling Browning of her brother's accidental death several years before, writes:

"Remember how you wrote in your *Gismond:*

> What says the body when they spring
> Some monstrous torture-engine's whole
> Strength on it? No more says soul.

And you never wrote anything which *lived* with me more than *that*. It is such a dreadful truth. But you know it for truth, I hope, by your genius, and not by such proof as mine." It was indeed "by his genius" that he saw this truth, the dramatic realization of a state of spirit he had never felt.

The Glove (Page 62)

This poem is based on an old story told by Poullain de St. Croix in his *Essays on Paris:* "One day while Francis the first was amusing himself with looking at a combat between his lions, a lady having let her glove drop, said to De Lorges, 'If you would have me believe you love me as much as you swear you do, go, and bring back my glove.' De Lorges went down and picked up the glove from amidst the ferocious beasts, returned, and threw it in the lady's face, and in spite of all her advances and cajoleries, would never look at her again." Schiller seeing this story, wrote his ballad in June, 1797, and straightway sent it to Goethe. Nearly forty years later, Leigh Hunt printed his version of the story, which greatly increased the lady's shame. Browning, evidently in retort to Hunt, produced his poem, chivalrously defending the lady from the insult and ignominy. Miss Barrett wrote to Browning: "For your *Glove* all women should be grateful,—and Ronsard, honored in this fresh shower of music on his old grave—though the chivalry of the interpretation, as well as so much beside, is so plainly yours could only be yours, perhaps. And even you are forced to let in a third person—close to the doorway—before you can do any good. What a noble lion you give us too, with the 'flash on his forehead' and 'leagues in the desert already' as we look on him—And the lady's speech—so calm and proud—yet a little bitter."

Schiller's poem, translated by Bulwer-Lytton, and Hunt's are subjoined for comparison.

The Glove

Translated from Schiller

Before his lion-court,
To see the griesly sport,
    Sate the king;
Beside him grouped his princely peers,
And dames aloft, in circling tiers,
    Wreath'd round their blooming ring.

King Francis, where he sate,
Raised a finger—yawned the gate,
And, slow from his repose,
A lion goes!

Dumbly he gazed around
The foe-encircled ground;
And, with a lazy gape,
He stretched his lordly shape,
And shook his careless mane,
And—laid him down again.

A finger raised the King—
And nimbly have the guard
A second gate unbarred;
Forth, with a rushing spring,
A tiger sprung!
Wildly the wild one yelled
When the lion he beheld;
And, bristling at the look,
With his tail his sides he strook,
And rolled his rabid tongue;
In many a wary ring
He swept round the forest king,
With a fell and rattling sound;—
And laid him on the ground,
Grommelling!

The King raised his finger; then
Leaped two leopards from the den
With a bound;
And boldly bounded they
Where the crouching tiger lay
Terrible!
And he gripped the beasts in his deadly hold;
In the grim embrace they grappled and rolled;
Rose the lion with a roar!
And stood the strife before;
And the wild cats on the spot,
From the blood-thirst, wroth and hot,
Halted still!
Now from the balcony above,
A snowy hand let fall a glove;
Midway between the beasts of prey,
Lion and tiger; there it lay,
The winsome lady's glove!

Fair Cunigonde said, with a lip of scorn
To the knight De Lorges—"If the love you have sworn
Were as gallant and leal as you boast it to be,
I might ask you to bring back that glove to me!"

The knight left the place where the lady sate;
The knight he has passed through the fearful gate;
The lion and tiger he stooped above,
And his fingers have closed on the lady's glove!

All shuddering and stunned, they beheld him there—
The noble knights and the ladies fair;
But loud was the joy and the praise the while
He bore back the glove with his tranquil smile!

With a tender look in her softening eyes,
That promised reward to his warmest sighs,
Fair Cunigonde rose her knight to grace,
He tossed the glove in the lady's face!
"Nay, spare me the guerdon, at least," quoth he;
And he left forever that fair ladye!

The Glove and the Lions

King Francis was a hearty king, and loved a royal sport,
And one day as his lions fought, sat looking on the court;
The nobles filled the benches, with the ladies by their side,
And 'mongst them sat the Count de Lorge, with one for whom he sighed.
And truly 't was a gallant thing to see that crowning show,
Valor and love; and a king above; and the royal beasts below.

Ramped and roared the lions, with horrid laughing jaws;
They bit, they glared, gave blows like bears, a wind went with their paws;
With wallowing might and stifled roar they rolled on one another,
Till all the pit with sand and mane, was in a thunderous smother;
The bloody foam above the bars came whizzing through the air,
Said Francis then, "Faith, gentlemen, we 're better here than there."

De Lorge's love o'erheard the King, a beauteous lively dame,
With smiling lips and sharp bright eyes, which always seemed the same;
She thought, the Count, my lover is brave as brave can be;
He surely would do wondrous things to show his love of me;
"King, ladies, lovers, all look on; the occasion is divine;
I 'll drop my glove, to prove his love; great glory will be mine."

She dropped her glove, to prove his love, then looked at him and smiled;
He bowed, and in a moment leaped among the lions wild:

The leap was quick, return was quick, he has regained his place,
Then threw the glove, but not with love, right in the lady's face.
"By heaven!" said Francis, "rightly done!" and he rose from where he sat:
"No love," quoth he, "but vanity, sets love a task like that."

Compare these three versions carefully. Which uses the story to best advantage? What differences are there in the treatment of the lion? How does Browning minimize the leap into the pit? How does Browning interpret the flinging of the glove? How does he interpret the character of De Lorge? Why does he add the humbler suitor who follows the lady from the court? Is anything gained by using the monologue instead of direct narration? Why should Browning use Ronsard as the narrator, rather than De Lorge or the Lady? Weigh well each phase of Miss Barrett's comment. Note that Browning found certain suspicions of the affection of De Lorge in St. Croix. How does Browning allow the lady to speak for herself?

Peter Ronsard. Ronsard was one of the chief poets of the time of King Francis, and Browning contrasts him with Clement Marot (line 45), a fellow-poet of the same day, who was more conventional and artificial.

12. Naso: Publius Ovidius Naso, the poet Ovid, the poet of fine sentiment and polite sayings.

14. Men are the merest Ixions. They devote themselves to fruitless and impossible tasks—a moral platitude, which wearies the King.

48. Versifies David the Psalmist. Marot versified forty-nine of the Psalms.

50. Illum Juda Leonem de Tribu: "the Lion of the Tribe of Judah." See *Revelation* v, 5.

162. Nemean: referring to the fable of the Nemean lion which Hercules overcame.

Muckle-Mouth Meg (Page 68)

The story of Muckle-Mouth Meg is one of the countless folk-tales gleaned by Scott in his rovings through the Border country, for he was

always a lover of a good story. He tells it in his own inimitable way in a letter dated Edinburgh, June 29, 1802: "I have some thoughts of attempting a Border ballad in the comic manner; but I almost despair of bringing it well out. A certain Sir William Scott, from whom I am descended, was ill-advised enough to plunder the estate of Sir Gideon Murray of Elibank, ancestor to the present Lord Elibank. The marauder was defeated, seized, and brought in fetters to the castle of Elibank, on the Tweed. The Lady Murray (agreeably to the custom of all ladies in ancient tales) was seated on the battlements, and descried the return of her husband with his prisoners. She immediately inquired what he meant to do with the young Knight of Harden, which was the *petit titre* of Sir William Scott. 'Hang the robber, assuredly,' was the answer of Sir Gideon. 'What!' answered the lady, 'hang the handsome young Knight of Harden, when I have three ill-favored daughters unmarried! No, no, Sir Gideon, we 'll force him to marry our Meg.' Now tradition says that Meg Murray was the ugliest woman in the four counties, and that she was called, in the homely dialect of the time, *meikle-mouthed Meg*. Sir Gideon, like a good husband and tender father, entered into his wife's sentiments, and proffered to Sir William the alternative of becoming his son-in-law, or decorating with his carcase the kindly gallows of Elibank. The lady was so very ugly that Sir William, the handsomest man of his time, positively refused the honor of her hand. Three days were allowed him to make up his mind; and it was not till he found one end of a rope made fast to his neck, and the other knitted to a sturdy oak bough, that his resolution gave way, and he preferred an ugly wife to the literal noose. It is said that they were afterward a very happy couple." (Lockhart's *Life of Scott*.) Scott apparently failed to write the proposed comic ballad, but turned the task over to his friend James Ballantyne, whose version is given in Stedman's *Victorian Anthology*.

Browning was doubtless acquainted with both versions of the story and probably wrote his own in a sheer sense of the fun in the incident, this too when he was past seventy-five years of age. Compare the three versions for their effectiveness. What features did Browning add to the story? Which author handles the climax of

the story best? Could the character element be increased in these versions? Which is best adapted in its literary style to the tale?

3. **Chiel:** a fellow.
7. **Callant:** lad.
21. **Parritch:** porridge.
31. **Bubblyjock:** a turkey.
39. **Minnikin-mou':** tiny-mouth.

My Last Duchess (Page 70)

We have here a tragedy in fifty-six lines. One of the great Italian noblemen of the later Renaissance is conversing with a messenger, come to negotiate a marriage for his master's daughter. They have been viewing the art collections of this noble connoisseur, and come at last to a curtained picture. That picture is the key to the Duke's character, and his life-story. Frà Pandolf (a purely fictitious artist) had caught "the spot of joy" on the Duchess' cheek, "the depth and passion of her earnest glance," and the "faint half-flush that dies along her throat" till the stranger, startled by the soul in the picture, had turned, and seemed, as "he would ask, if he durst, how such a glance came there." So the Duke superciliously tells the story of the beautiful, joyous, young wife, who had come for a brief time as mistress of the magnificent palace. Her simplicity, her gladness of heart, her plebeian kindliness unfitted her for the conventional dignities of the Duke, her master. She gave deadly offense when she ranked his "gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name with anybody's gift." "Who 'd stoop to blame this sort of trifling," he comments scornfully, and there is something of defeated egotism in his "I choose never to stoop." With a brutal sense of mastery, he "gave commands; then all smiles stopped together." The poet was questioned several times as to the "commands," but usually evaded direct answer. But he once replied "Yes, I meant he had her put to death." Then as an afterthought, he added "Or he might have her put in a nunnery." Some have claimed that the Duke slew her rather by the slower, more cruel means of repressing her life and cutting it off from all joy. Which explanation do you prefer? Why did Browning add the thought of the nunnery?

The Duke represents the whole group of master-connoisseurs of the late Renaissance, whose patronage of art and pride in their collections were quite divorced from the finer life of the spirit, which Browning sought and admired in artist and art-lover alike. The poet has invented the story and character of the Duchess to assist him in portraying the Duke's character, but the reader's interest quickly passes to her; for her soul shines through the words of even her unsympathetic husband.

Was there any good artistic reason for Browning's use of fictitious rather than real artists in Frà Pandolf and Claus of Innsbruck?

Ferrara. The Dukes of Ferrara were among the most notable patrons of art in Renaissance Italy.

3, 16. Frà Pandolf: a purely imaginary artist.

56. Claus of Innsbruck: an imaginary worker in bronze.

The Flight of the Duchess (Page 72)

As *My Last Duchess* represents the tragic ruin of joyous girlhood in the power of a harsh, formal master, so *The Flight of the Duchess* is the comedy of her escape from such ruthless bondage. The times, persons, and places in the two poems are professedly different, but the essential relations of the girl-wife and her conventionalized husband are the same in both.

The ladies are closely akin spiritually; their gladness, simplicity, spontaneity, their unconsciousness of conventional bonds, unfit them for the purely formal life of a fine lady. They are true sisters, and have much in common with Colombe and Pippa of the dramas. The two Dukes are likewise akin in their formality, their sense of propriety, their self-importance, an egotism so overmastering as to shut their sympathies from all else beyond their own person. The Duke of Ferrara, however, is far the more accurate picture of the high-born noble, in spite of his dabbling in art, which touches the mere outside of his nature; he is a hard, strong man, dangerous to all opposition. The other Duke is rather a caricature of the fine gentleman with a hobby; he is no longer terrible, he is merely ridiculous. The poet delights in exposing his feeble attempts at intelligence and dignity,

much as Dickens did with Lord Deadlock in *Bleak House*. These men are suited respectively to tragic and comic plots. Browning must have been stirred to strong indignation against the first Duke and his brutality, and he vented his feeling by creating the second Duke. On him he takes a comic vengeance and for him creates a retribution in the flight of the Duchess from her grand castle to the freedom and love of the gipsy camp.

The poem, Browning once declared, took shape around the refrain of a song he had heard in boyhood "Following the Queen of the Gipsies!" "It is an odd fact," he wrote to Miss Barrett, "that of the *poem*, the real conception of an evening, (two years ago, fully) not a line is written. . . . But as I conceived the poem, it consisted entirely of the Gipsy's description of the life the Lady was to lead with her future Gipsy lover—a real life, not an unreal one like that with the Duke. And as I meant to write it, all their wild adventures would have come out, and the insignificance of the former vegetation have been deducible only—as the main subject has become now."

The first two hundred lines of the poem were "given to poor Thomas Hood in his emergency at a day's notice," wrote Browning. It was printed in full in *Bells and Pomegranates* that same year, 1845. Miss Barrett declared: "Be sure she will be the world's Duchess and be received as one of your most striking poems. Full of varied power the poem is. I cannot say how deeply it has impressed me." Miss Barrett speaks in other letters of her impression of the remarkable metrical effects of the poem. "The rhythm of that Duchess does more and more strike me as a new thing; something like (if like anything) what the Greeks called pedestrian meter—between meter and prose—the difficult rimes combining quite curiously with the easy looseness of the general measure." And again: "the Duchess appears to me more than ever new-minted golden coin—the rhythm of it answering to your own description, 'speech half-asleep, or song half-awake.' You have right of trove to these novel effects of rhythm." And in still another place: "Your perfect rimes, perfectly new, and all clashing together as by natural attraction, had put me at once to shame and admiration."

Browning uses double rimes with surprising ease and frequency

and occasionally uses triple rimes. The verse is dominantly four-accented and most of the apparently irregular lines should be tuned to this rhythm; but there are a few two and three accented lines. Yet the effect of the verse on the ear is varied incessantly and widely by all sorts of metrical liberties. "The incantation scene, just trenching on the supernatural, is wonderful," wrote Mrs. Browning, and the change of tone has been effected by cutting the line down to the four accented iambic.

From whose lips does Browning tell the story of the flight? What other possible narrators might he have chosen? What advantages and disadvantages in each case? What characteristics of the style of the poem may be attributed to the dramatic presentation of this speaker? Is the speaker's attitude dramatically true to his place as "servitor"? Does his attitude toward the old Duchess remain dramatically true to the "servitor," or does Browning's own feeling thrust itself into the story? What seems to be Browning's attitude toward the flight? What is his attitude toward the gipsy-queen? What is the theme of the gipsy's incantation, and how does it appeal directly to the Duchess? Would a more definite identification of the time and place of the action, as in Scott's poems, have bettered the effect of the romance?

The Guardian-Angel (Page 96)

This poem gives us Browning's own personal response to a beautiful picture by Guercino, of which he writes:

> We were at Fano, and three times we went
> To sit and see him in his chapel there,
> And drink his beauty to our soul's content.

Of this experience Mrs. Browning wrote to Miss Mitford, Aug. 24, 1848:

"As for ourselves we have scarcely done so well, yet well; having enjoyed a great deal in spite of drawbacks. Murray, the traitor, sent us to Fano as 'a delightful summer residence for an English family,' and we found it uninhabitable from heat, vegetation scorched to paleness, the very air swooning in the sun. 'A circulating library'

which does not give out books, and 'a refined and intellectual Italian society' (I quote Murray), which never reads a book through, complete the advantages of the place, yet the churches are beautiful, and a divine picture of Guercino is worth going all that way to see." Browning sent the poem with a postscript, here omitted, to his friend, Alfred Dommett, far away in New Zealand.

At the Mermaid (Page 97)

This is the supposed speech of Shakespeare to his boon companions at the Mermaid Tavern, where he enjoyed the company of some of the most famous wits and dramatists of the age. Shakespeare is responding to a toast by Ben Jonson, who has just pledged him as "next poet," succeeding Spenser, the "dead King" (died 1599). Shakespeare laughs away the proffered honor

> I "Next poet"? No, my hearties,
> I nor am, nor fain would be.

Browning presents here the fine lack of self-consciousness in that type of great genius, which is great, but entirely without the pose of greatness. To his friends Shakespeare will always be "friend, good fellow, gentle Will." He tries to prove his disclaimer by showing he lacks all the more ideal traits of the bard's character; for he is entirely reserved and impersonal in his art, and he has not a touch of misanthropic bitterness toward the world around him. Browning is probably true to the real Shakespeare in these matters, but he is evidently thinking also of his own attitude toward the artistic maladies of excessive personalism and the misanthropy in the Romantic verse of the preceding generation, particularly in the poetry of Byron and the German Romanticists. And Browning forgets the dramatic purport of his speech when he makes such references to Byron as "the Pilgrim," stanza xi.

None of our later poets have been so belligerently anti-personal as Browning. In his essay on Shelley, he makes a distinction between subjective and objective poetry, evidently giving his admiration more largely to the latter. In his *House* he even denies the personal

interpretation of the sonnets of Shakespeare. Yet the poetry of his predecessors, Wordsworth, Byron, and Shelley, had been strongly subjective. Browning seems to use Shakespeare in *At The Mermaid* to utter his own preference for objective verse, to which most of his own endeavor had been directed:

> Here 's my work: does work discover
> . . . my life?"
> Here 's the work I hand, this scroll,
> Yours to take or leave; as duly
> Mine remains the unproffered soul.

Browning as well as Shakespeare is represented when the speaker goes on to disclaim all Byronic misanthropy, or Teutonic *welt schmerz*. "Have you found your life distasteful?" he questions, "my life did and does smack sweet."

> I find earth not grey but rosy,
> Heaven not grim but fair of hue.
> Do I stoop? I pluck a posy.
> Do I stand and stare? All 's blue.

This is Browning's own optimism and joy in life asserting itself, and by a paradox of art, he is truly personal in these verses while praising the impersonality of the master poet. We have here a characteristic breakdown of the impersonal dramatic art when the mask half slips aside from the face and betrays the ill-concealed poet.

The figure that thou here seest, etc.: an adaptation of Ben Jonson's lines concerning the portrait woodcut in the first folio of Shakespeare's works.

16. The dead king: probably referring to Spenser who died at the time when Shakespeare was just reaching the height of his reputation.

50. Orichalc: bronze; so called by Shakespeare.

81. Your Pilgrim: a purposely anachronistic reference to Byron, the author of the *Pilgrimage of Childe Harold*.

103. Marlowe: Shakespeare's famous predecessor in tragedy.

104, 128. Ben: Ben Jonson, who was one of Shakespeare's greatest contemporaries and most cordial admirers.

The Boy and the Angel (Page 102)

This papal legend from an undetermined source has the simplicity of a miracle tale. Browning does not attempt to put it into monologue form. Why? Note that the exclamation *Praise God* in lines 2 and 8 takes the time of two full metrical feet and should be pronounced with fullness of sound and raised voice.

Amphibian (Page 106)

This poem like *On the Cliff* is not a dramatic monologue, but is a metaphor suggested by the experience told in the five opening stanzas. Passing on through the questions in the seventh and eighth stanzas, he thinks of "a certain soul," his wife, who had been dead eleven years, looking down upon the "one who in the world, both lives and likes life's way," but who in the duality of his life, *amphibian*, may escape from the "worldly noise and dust" into the sphere of poetry, where

> Emancipate through passion,
> And thought, with sea for sky,
> We substitute, in a fashion,
> For heaven,—poetry.

Such seems to have been the meaning and value of poetry in these later years to Robert Browning, who to all outward appearances was a thoroughly satisfied worldling. The final stanza, rising to the thought of Mrs. Browning, is one of the rare escapes of his personally private feeling into his poetry.

Among the Rocks (Page 109)

Among the Rocks goes on to a kindred thought: If love thus stoops to the ignoble, is it not debased? How of this exalting love which misappraises the base and bare? The elemental forces of nature in sea and earth with their strong restorative power, answer

> If you loved only what were worth your love,
> Love were clear gain and wholly well for you:
> Make the low nature better by your throes.

Rabbi Ben Ezra (Page 110)

Is it for nothing we grow old,
We whom God loves?
Death in the Desert.

By the spirit, when age shall o'ercome thee, thou still shalt enjoy
More indeed, than at first when inconscious, the life of a boy.
Saul.

Rabbi Ben Ezra (1090–1166) was a learned Spanish Jew, commentator on the Old Testament, scholar, and philosopher. Browning had referred to him ten years before in *Holy Cross Day*, ascribing to him the grand hymn with which that poem closes. Yet Browning has made almost no attempt to realize dramatically the personality and situation of the venerable Rabbi, and uses him as a mere mouthpiece for his own utterance of truth. Browning, possibly by reason of the living example of his own father, had come to regard age not as a time oppressed by decrepitude, but as endowed with vision and spiritual power. Contrast with this Tennyson's *By an Evolutionist*, Arnold's *Growing Old*, and Longfellow's sonnet of farewell to his books. This hopeful view of old age, which is so sincere with Browning, is but incidental in the poem to the larger truths which came straight from Browning's personal convictions concerning the problems of existence,—the union of soul and body, the overmastering violence of the body-passion, the presence of sin and sorrow in the world, the ineffective aspirations of the human heart, the progress from youth and strength to age and infirmity, life beyond death, and the Divine attitude toward humanity. The poem should accordingly be studied without regard to its dramatic form, and solely for its utterance of truth.

2. **The best is yet to be.** Compare the *Inn Album*, Book IV:

> My life's remainder, which, say what fools will,
> Is, or should be the best of life,—its fruit,
> All tends to, root and stem and leaf and flower.

7, 10. **Flowers, stars:** that is, pleasures and ideals.

16. **I prize the doubt.** Browning speaks repeatedly of the

value of doubt as a quickener of the spiritual struggle through which man grows.

17. Low kinds: the lower animals which are untroubled by the Divine spark. Compare line 28.

19–21. Poor vaunt of life, etc. Browning's rebuke to the hedonists who measure all values in life by their pleasure-giving quality.

24. Irks care: does care, irk, or overburden?

25–26. That which doth provide. Browning elaborates this thought in *The Eagle*, one of the Ferishtah Fancies.

28. Spark: a favorite figure in Browning for the Divine in man.

31–36. Then welcome, etc. This welcoming of the difficulties of life for their disciplinary value is frequent in Browning.

40–41. What I aspired to be, etc. Compare

> 'T is not what man does which exalts him, but what man would do.
> *Saul.*
>
> Better have failed in the high aim as I,
> Than vulgarly in the low aim succeed.
> *Inn Album.*
>
> That low man seeks a little thing to do,
> Sees it and does it.
> This high man, with a great aim to pursue;
> Dies ere he knows it.
> *Grammarian's Funeral.*

44. Whose flesh hath soul to suit: Whose soul is so debased as to fit the mere animal needs of the body.

45. Whose spirit, etc. Compare *Easter Day*, xx:

> Thy choice was earth: thou didst attest
> 'T was better spirit should subserve
> The flesh, than flesh refine to nerve
> Beneath the spirit's play.

49–54. Yet gifts should prove their use, etc. Browning had nothing of the ascetic in him, and with Fra Lippo Lippi declares:

> This world 's no blot for us,
> Nor blank, it means intensely and means good:
> To find its meaning is my meat and drink.

See also *Saul*, stanza ix.

57. I who saw power, etc. This coupling of the divine Love with the divine Power as constituting his conception of the Godhead is repeatedly found in Browning's religious poems, in *Paracelsus*, in *Easter Day*, in *A Death in the Desert*, and in the Pope's monologue, *The Ring and the Book*.

65–66. Possessions of the brute. See Cleon's account of the physical perfection of the animal mechanism:

> the shell sucks fast the rock,
> The fish strikes through the sea, . . . the birds take flight,
> Till life's mechanics can no further go.

68. Spite of the flesh, etc.: the usual formula of the ascetic, not infrequently degenerating into cant.

72. Nor soul helps flesh more now, etc. Compare *Saul*, 151:

> In our flesh grows the branch of this life, in our soul it bears fruit.

79–84. And I shall, etc. Browning again refers to the activity and strife beyond the grave in the *Epilogue to Asolando*.

90. I shall know being old. Compare stanza xx.

91–96. When evening shuts, etc. Note carefully the significance of this simile.

102. The Past. Compare line 50.

114. Wait death nor be afraid. This is elaborated in *Prospice*.

115–117. Enough now, etc. Man has attained sufficiently in this earthly life if he has come to know divine Light and Truth as well as he knows his own hand.

124–126. Was I, the world arraigned, right, etc. In age he would at last find out the truth of many a moral debate in his former years.

133–138. Not on the vulgar mass, etc. Browning's great declaration of the moral value of motive rather than deed. Compare *The Ring and the Book*, x, 470–474:

> The inward work and worth
> Of any mind, what other mind may judge
> Save God, who only knows the thing he made,
> The veritable service he exacts?
> It is the outward product men appraise.

151–186. That Potter's wheel, etc. The metaphor of the potter's wheel is taken from *Jeremiah* xviii (repeated in *Isaiah* liv, 8), but it is elaborated by Browning to suit his belief that God is moulding the individual man in the probation of earthly life for higher lives beyond.

156. Seize to-day. The *carpe diem* of the Epicurean philosophers, which has been paraphrased, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die"—a doctrine far removed from the virile strength of Browning. It has been exquisitely paraphrased by Tennyson in the *Ancient Sage.*

157–162. All that is, etc. In *Abt Vogler* Browning declares: "The evil is null, is naught, is silence implying sound; what was good shall be good."

170–174. Laughing loves . . . skull-things: symbolic of the gayeties of youth over against the gravity of age.

180. Heaven's consummate cup: that is, the perfected spiritual being, wrought by the ordeal of life, will have no further need of earth.

181–192. But I need, etc. The two closing stanzas form an invocation as the poet turns to God in submissive prayer, less eloquently and with less fervor of religious passion than is shown in the same turning to God by David and Abt Vogler.

Saul (Page 118)

The suggestion for this poem evidently came to Browning from I *Samuel,* xvi, 23: "And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him." The poet has tried to realize by his imagination the situation, and to re-utter the course of song by which the glad-hearted shepherd boy cheered the despondent King. But it is more than the song of David to Saul, it is the song of faith and gladness in the heart of man as he views life wholesomely over against the despondency of the embittered and disillusioned spirit. It is to a certain extent Browning's own optimism singing his own joy.

The poem might well be called David rather than Saul as the latter is purely secondary. Saul would relapse in his bitterness. But David in searching his heart for a ministration of joy to the suffering King had had a vision which confirmed him as a Seer of the Almighty. Henceforth he would be a prophet to his people. He is supposed to be telling his experience the day following when the spiritual excitement has somewhat waned, to some nameless auditor—possibly his father Jesse. Why did Browning leave this auditor unindentified? Why neglect to make real the scene and setting in which David tells the story while he realizes so vividly the scene between David and Saul?

The poem consists of four movements of this song of the good of life, arranged in climax, as David rises from truth to truth, the movements separated by descriptive and narrative interludes that give setting and significance to the song.

The first presents David's simple joy in the commonplace things of his common life—his own shepherd song, the songs of the wild creatures of field and pasture, and the song of the homely community of interest in wedding and funeral and the common toil of man. It is the song of happy youth.

Next he presents the exhilaration of a more vital and thrilling life—of the man alive to his finger-tips, throbbing with pent-up physical energy, keenly and interestedly responsive to the whole human drama around him. Though it is more passionate, more ecstatic, it is still a merely earthly life. "Oh, the wild joys of living," leaps naturally to his lips. As he says later in the poem: "Song filled to the verge his cup with the wine of this life."

The third song sings the joy of personality and of personal influence. From the strong masterful life power flows unceasingly, and this sense of personal power is a joy. Saul, Browning, every strong man will respond to the utterance:

> each ray of thy will,
> Every flash of thy passion and prowess, long over, shall thrill
> Thy whole people, the countless, with ardor, till they too give forth
> A like cheer to their sons . . .
> With the radiance thy deed was the germ of.

This fame has established Saul as one of the master influences among his nation. David could offer Saul no higher ground of joy, and the King responsive to the cry "Then first of the mighty, thank God that thou art," " slowly resumed his old motions and attitudes kingly."

At last, as David yearned to give an even higher joy, the joy in immortality, "the Truth came upon him." Like a flash he realized God's love and God's provision against man's sin and weakness, the love of God, the Father, as revealed in Jesus Christ. We have here not merely the prophecy of the actual David, but the deeper religious thought of Browning himself. This song is the culmination of the poem, and rises steadily to the words "See the Christ stand."

In the last stanza of the poem, the high prophetic passion modulates quietly back to common life and thought through the descriptions of nature and of her quiet at the hour of dawn.

The poem as originally printed in 1845, in *Bells and Pomegranates* consisted merely of the first nine stanzas; the remainder was added ten years later while Browning was writing his great series of poems known as *Men and Women*. What is the comparative value of the longer and shorter versions? Does the portion added change the purpose and effect of the poem? Is there any change in literary style in the addition?

The metrical movement of the poem is a vigorous chant in five accented, anapestic lines. The poet has taken unusual liberties with the pattern verse, some for the moment seemingly irreducible to the regular movement, yet when properly read, the verse keeps its march. Note that in line 97, the words *King Saul* by deliberate, impressive enunciation take the full time of two metrical feet. The poem was originally printed in short lines of three and two accents alternately, thus:

Oh all, all the world offers singly,
On one head combine,
On one head the joy and the pride,
Even rage like the throe
That opes the rock, helps its glad labor,
And lets the gold go—

And ambition that sees a sun lead it,
Oh, all of these—all
Combine to unite in one creature
—Saul!

Compare the revised form of these closing lines of stanza ix.

Prospice (Page 137)

Look Forward: This is the challenge cry of Browning, our modern Mr. Greatheart, as he faces the thought of death, not an impersonal dramatic lyric voicing the feeling of another. It was written only a few months after the death of Mrs. Browning, and was first published in the *Atlantic Monthly* out of regard for his many American readers. The "Arch Fear" of death has no terror for him; he, "who was ever a fighter," can shout, "one fight more, the best and the last," in spite of the "power of the night" and the dread of the "black minute." The rhetoric of this earlier half is full of the sinewy strength of the defiance, which modulates into a softer note as he thinks of reunion with Mrs. Browning. The final climax of spiritual ecstasy is one of Browning's noblest words.

Compare with it Browning's version of Hercules facing the apparition of death in *Balaustion's Adventure*, his version of the *Alcestis* of Euripides:

I will go and lie in wait for Death, black-stoled
King of corpses! I shall find him, sure
Drinking beside the tomb, o' the sacrifice:
And if I lie in ambuscade, and leap
Out of my lair, and seize, encircle him,
There lives not one shall pull him from me
. . . before he let the woman go.

One summons of the whole magnific frame;
Each sinew to its service,—up he caught,
And over shoulder cast, the lion-shag,
Let the club go,—for had he not those hands?
And so went striding off . . . to the suburb tomb.

"Death," said Browning when its shadow was over him, "is life; just as our daily, our momentarily dying body is none the less alive

and ever recruiting new forces of existence. Without death, which is our crape-like, churchyard word for change, for growth, there could be no prolongation of that which we call life. For myself, I deny death as an end of anything. Never say of me that I am dead."

Epilogue to Asolando (Page 138)

The Epilogue to Asolando, written in the closing weeks of Browning's life to bring his last volume to a close, is the poet's farewell to those who had loved him, but who after his death will sorrow for the quelling of his great spirit, a spirit well described in the third stanza. "No," he cries, "Greet the unseen with a cheer," for in the great unknown beyond death he will still be going forward valiantly in the same great moral struggle which calls forth his energies "there as here." Compare with it Tennyson's *Crossing the Bar* and Longfellow's sonnet of farewell, *Wapentake*.

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